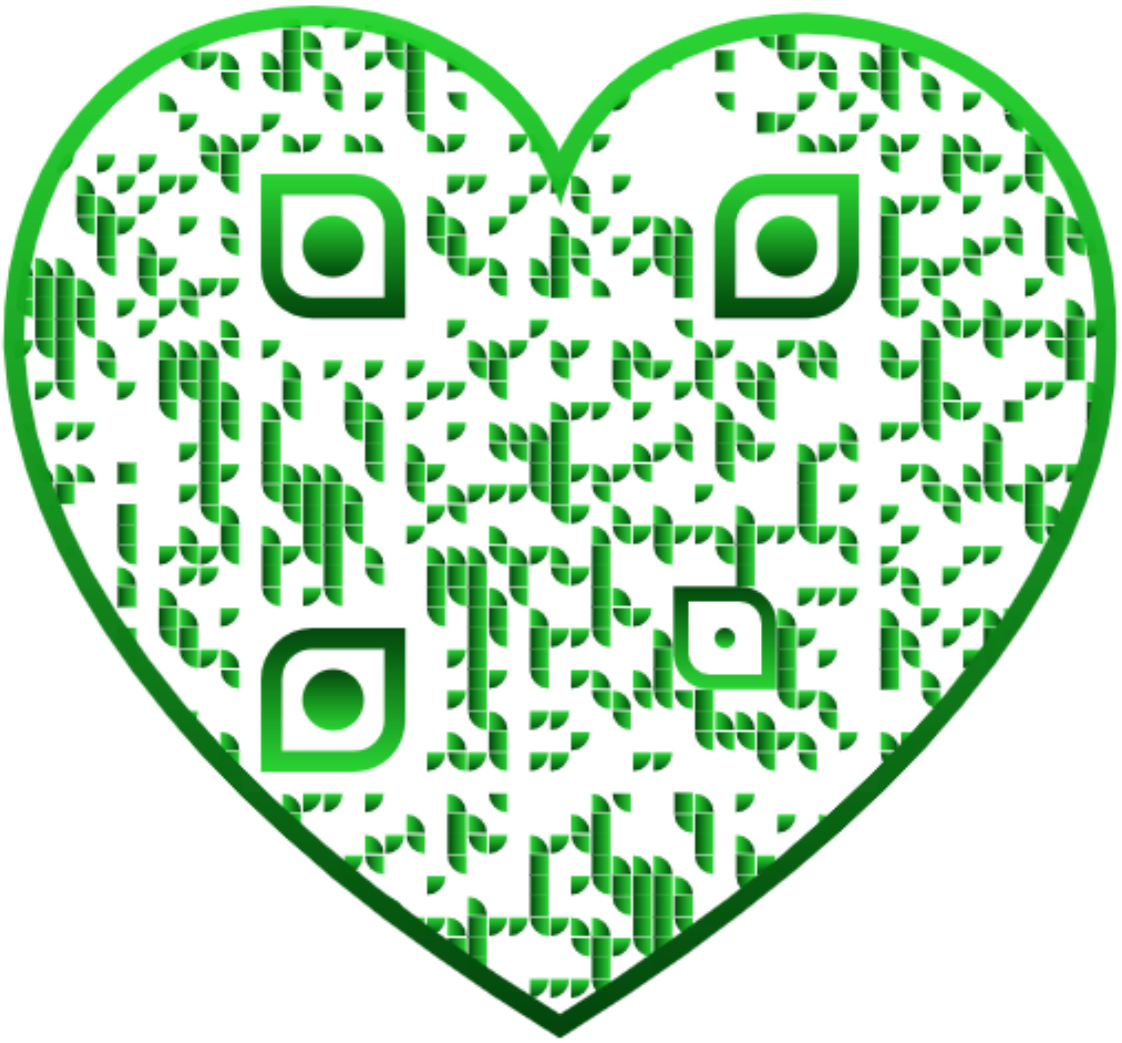
Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science

Helaine Selin
Robert M. Rakoff *Editors*

Death Across Cultures

Death and Dying in Non-Western Cultures

Springer



Helaine Selin • Robert M. Rakoff
Editors

Death Across Cultures

Death and Dying in Non-Western Cultures

Springer

Introduction

Death is universal. It is a biological given. We all die.

But how we die, where we die, how we commemorate death, and how we think about dying and death are as varied as any human practices.

Death is local. And culturally structured.

But this variety of ways of dying is being transformed by the forces of modernity. Traditional rites and beliefs are being re-shaped by urbanization, the medicalization of dying, the commercialization of funerals, and the spread of Christianity and other aspects of Euro-American colonialism and global capitalism. As people move from villages to cities and enter into urban market life, it becomes more and more difficult to sustain the age-old practices that have brought meaning and order to the chasm and grief of death. Local burial sites are far away, while traditional social roles and expectations are often weakened by the force of new hierarchies and the monetization of social obligations, whether in the nearby urban centre or in the farther reaches of global diasporas.

The chapters in this book detail the many ways in which the people of non-Western cultures are mediating the tensions between traditional rituals and beliefs and the homogenizing force of western and northern systems. They provide rich descriptions of funeral practices and beliefs about death and dying in a wide range of cultures from Africa, South America, Asia, and the indigenous peoples of Australia, New Zealand, and North America. Authors talk about the medicalization of death, the growth of hospital-based deaths across the globe, the rise of palliative care in India, the substitution of money payments for more traditional mourning roles by eldest sons in African cities, the spread of commercial funeral businesses in Africa, the politicization of urban cemeteries in Iran and South America, and other similar examples of the changing landscape of death and dying in the non-Western world. They also discuss cultural adaptations to the increase of anomalous and "unnatural" deaths of young people caught up in the AIDS/HIV crisis in Africa. What is also very clear is that many cultures do not consider death as an ending, but just part of the continuum of moving from being alive to being an ancestor. Providing a good funeral means that the dying relative will have a safer journey and insures that the living will be free from any sort of evil after.

The first section of the book deals with Asia. The chapter on China posits that urbanization has been accompanied by the growth of the cemetery industry, the establishment of new occupations in funerary-related services, and the creation of educational institutions to produce workers for these occupations. There have also been new forms of memorialization and subtle changes in beliefs about the soul and the afterlife.

In India, studies show that karma, the belief that every deed of a living being will have a consequence in this life or in a latter one, and mokṣa, release from the cycle of death and rebirth, give direction to the experience of illness and death in two very different contemporary contexts. One is in Varanasi and the other in a cancer ward in New Delhi.

The chapter on Japan examines ancestor worship, beliefs in reincarnation, senses of the brevity of human life and suicide, and scepticism about any world beyond this one, as attitudes toward death in Japanese history that have extended into the present. Death is becoming not simply a matter of household ancestral worship but also the setting for exploring an individual's sense of life after death.

The next chapter examines the politics of death space in Hong Kong. It explains the shrinkage of death time and space over the past few decades and highlights the newest debates on the shortage of urn spaces for the interment of human cremains. Hong Kong Chinese, who still practise ancestral worship and carry on with the tradition of grave-sweeping, are trying to find an appropriate way to handle ancestors' ashes.

In the chapter on Vietnam, the authors show how people cope with death and dying and explain their beliefs, fears, and rituals. Since many people are Buddhist, the death of an older person is acceptable and not shocking. The family members invite priests rather than medical personnel. There is a fear of hospitals and the hope that the death will bring good fortune to the rest of the family and not bad luck.

Singapore provides an excellent case study of traditional rituals in an urban context. Singapore society has undergone a rapid process of modernization and industrialization which has changed the physical and cultural milieu of the Chinese. The chapter examines the meanings and significance of death for the Chinese, beginning with the preparations for death, followed by the funeral and the burial and one's ascension as an ancestor.

The Iran chapter focusses on the Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery in Tehran, one of the largest in the world. Due to the high volume of bodies arriving for burial every day as well as the uniformity of Shia Islamic burial rituals, protocols have developed to implement an efficient division of labour and speed up the process. The authors study how this organizational and bureaucratic division of labour interacts with the community-oriented spirit of Shia Islamic burial rituals.

The next section concerns Africa. Most Africans, especially the Zulu people of South Africa, believe that burying their loved ones in the grave is the most respectful practice and a gateway to the ancestors. The chapter examines the way of life of the Zulus, and their philosophies with regard to grief, mourning, and the rituals of death in relation to the two chief practices of inhumation and cremation.

In Botswana, funerals are a primary forum in which people enact core values of caring and love for each other. Love and care are asserted in funerals against suspicions of jealousy and resentment, and increasingly against ideas that modernity has brought new forms of death, alienation from core values, and new forms of self-development that focus on the self and direct offspring.

The conception of ancestors is of utmost importance in African death. But becoming an ancestor implies strict requirements and the performance of specific ceremonies. What happens when someone with the potential to become an ancestor dies as a migrant, far from the home grounds? The next chapter follows the process of creating an ancestor through a voyage from Guinea-Bissau to Portugal and back to the original grounds. The author explores how transnationalism and the circulation of material goods, bodies, and spirits work to re-create identities that connect the life and death of African migrants in the contemporary world.

The chapter on Ghana explores the use of funeral sarcophagi known as fantasy coffins which have contributed to the continuation and reinvention of practices and beliefs surrounding death. The author illustrates these artefacts as a strategy carried out by individuals to achieve some specific ends, so as to grasp the manner in which people currently transform funeral practices and their objects to meet new needs, express a new imaginary horizon, and create new meanings in a contemporary context.

For the Yoruba of Nigeria, death is often thought of as the beginning of another stretch of existence. In their traditional and modern outlooks, they have always explained it within their system of apprehending the cosmos. Death is seen as the definer of human mortality which makes the Yoruba traditional view of life as stage and humans as actors and actresses fundamental bases for elaborate ceremonies that are equal to performances targeted at entertainment.

The chapter on Togo presents changes in the funeral rituals which concern the time and place of burial, the attitude to experiencing mourning, and the change of final references resulting from one's worldview. The emphasis shifts from good death to a beautiful funeral, the high price of which is paid by the relatives of the deceased both to preserve the good image of the deceased and to protect family honour and social solidarity.

The next section covers Mexico and South America. The chapter on Mexico shows the way that death is seen and commemorated, the multiple origins of the festivities which are held today and how they have survived, blended, and overlapped with modern practices. Several approaches to the celebrations and rituals for the dead are explored in order to understand the diversity of practices in the modern urban setting.

This chapter on Brazil analyses changes and continuity in funeral rites, both in rural and urban settings. In cities, changes have been greater, arising both from the urbanization process and the desocialization of death. The rites there have been abbreviated and simplified. These changes do not impact the importance of funerals, whose function is enabling the passage from the world of the living to the world of the dead and to bring safety and protection to the living.

In the chapter on Argentina, the authors describe and analyse the public debates on death with dignity, from the first attempts to regulate the rights of terminally ill patients to the political process that resulted in the "death with dignity" act. They discuss the social and political factors and explain the legal changes and ethical concerns related to a death with dignity in Argentina.

The chapter on Bogotá, Colombia, and Lima, Peru, engages with the meanings of death and the dead through a focus on urban cemetery cults, in which rural migrant populations in Latin American cities come to grips with a legacy of displacement and violence. The chapter explores two parallel cults: the veneration of folk saints and the communication with anonymous or forgotten dead, whose "restless souls" are deemed to be wandering in purgatory. The richness and diversity of the stories, cults, and practices centring on the dead body and its on-living soul is a valuable yet undervalued resource in contemporary urban life.

There are two chapters on the Pacific. One is on the Maori of New Zealand. In this chapter, the authors argue that not all Māori have been able to retain their traditional identities and tribal traditions. The forces of colonialism and increasing ethnic diversity continue to influence, shape, and produce contemporary heterogeneous identities. They argue for holistic indigenous care informed by a model of care that includes customs and protocols that wrap around the ill person and his or her family before, during, and following death.

The other, on the Tiwi of Australia, concerns interaction between the living and the dead. The dead need the living for a safe passage to the world of the dead, whereas the living need the dead to sustain life. The dead see to it that their descendants are nurtured by their land as well as being protected against illness and bad luck. The significance of the dead in Tiwi society surpasses the importance of the mythological ancestors, which also in part might be explained by the relatively high mortality rate and hence a higher incidence of unfinished business. These concerns are inseparably linked to an ongoing social discourse among the living.

The next two chapters deal with the indigenous cultures of North America. The experience of loss and death on traditions, family, language, culture, trust, and hope has been so familiar for American Indian populations that it has characterized these groups throughout recent centuries. The author reviews literature related to bereavement rituals, grieving, spirituality, and meaning of death for all groups in this population and presents the interplay of rituals and beliefs with historical trauma.

In the next chapter on the Inuit, the author states that Inuit elders do not fear death. On the contrary, death has a real power of attraction. He describes the places where Inuit go after death and how these places were transformed with the coming of Christianity. Life continues after death on two levels: while the double-soul joins the world of the dead, the name-soul is passed on to a newborn child and recycled. As for the living, their time comes when they can no longer cope with life. They can then easily opt for a better life elsewhere.

The final chapter, on Death Taboo, brings the whole book together. The fact that the death taboo is fervently debated and discussed suggests the paradox of its dis-

closure and evanescence. The proliferation of works on death and the afterlife in the modern era is rendering the subject of human mortality as more alive now than the many authors who have passed on. This is occurring at a time of an esoteric turn in thinking about the continuity of mind and the state of human consciousness beyond physical life. Extrapolations of near-death and post-death experiences are also contributing to new attitudes toward the meaning of after-death survival and the afterlife. Instead of witnessing an increase in death fears, we may now be heading in the direction of cultivating thanatos practice, the conscious effort to confront and prepare for the final moments of this life.

In sum, we see that, although there is increasing homogenization in the world, death still reflects the variety of human experiences across cultures. We hope that this collection of essays on that wide range of experience will spur further study and greater appreciation for the many ways of living and dying in human societies.

Contents

The Evolution of Funerary Ritual in Urbanizing China 1
Andrew B. Kipnis

Belief in Karma and *Mokṣa* at the End of Life in India 19
Joris Gielen and Komal Kashyap

Death and the Afterlife in Japan 41
Gordon Mathews

Return to Nature? Secularism and Politics of Death Space in Hong Kong 57
Yuk Wah Chan

Death and Dying: Belief, Fear and Ritual in Vietnamese Culture 75
Nguyen Duc Son and Giap Binh Nga

Negotiating Traditions and Modernity: Chinese Death Rituals in Singapore 83
Chee-Kiong Tong

The Bureaucratic Professionalization of Funeral Rites in Tehran's Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery 103
Zohreh Bayatrizi and Hajar Ghorbani

Death and Burial Practices in Contemporary Zulu Culture, South Africa 119
Sihawukele Ngubane

Death in Botswana: Life Among the Ashes 133
Deborah Durham

Ancestors and Death: From West Africa to Southwest Europe 151
Clara Saraiva

Living Coffins and Death Among the Ga of Ghana 167
Roberta Bonetti

The Yoruba of Nigeria and the Ontology of Death and Burial 193
Henri Oripeloye and Morufu Bukola Omigbule

Transformation of Funeral Rituals in Togo 207
Jacek Jan Pawlik

Rituals Around Life and Death in Mexico; The Day of the Dead 225
Adelina Arredondo and Cristina Casillas

Continuity and Ruptures in Brazilian Funeral Rites 243
Marisete T. Hoffmann-Horochovski and José Miguel Rasia

The Right to a Dignified Death in Argentina 261
Juan Pedro Alonso, Natalia Luxardo, and Javier Roberti

Superstar-Saints and Wandering Souls: The Cemetery as a Cultural Hotspot in Latin American Cities 275
Christien Klaufus

He taonga tuku iho: Indigenous End of Life and Death Care Customs of New Zealand Māori 295
Tess Moeke-Maxwell, Kathleen Mason, Frances Toohey, Rawiri Wharemate, and Merryn Gott

Communicating with the Dead in an Australian Aboriginal Culture: The Tiwi from Melville and Bathurst Islands 317
Eric Venbrux

Death and Dying in American Indian Cultures 335
Andrea C. Walker

The Beauty of the Afterlife Among the Inuit of Nunavut 351
Frédéric Laugrand

Eternity Calling: Modernity and the Revival of Death and the Afterlife 369
Raymond L. M. Lee

Index 385

Biographies

Juan Pedro Alonso is a sociologist. He received his Ph.D. in social sciences from the University of Buenos Aires. He is currently a researcher at the Gino Germani Research Institute and the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET) in Argentina. His research interests include sociology of death and dying, bioethics, chronic conditions, and health policies.

Adelina Arredondo is a researcher in the Institute of Sciences of Education, at the Autonomous University of the State of Morelos, Mexico. She has supervised 36 theses and published nine books and 80 papers about the history of education, teacher training, and educational policies. She had been a visiting scholar in Toronto University, Windsor University, Valencia University, the Institute of National Pedagogical Research (INRP), University of Lille, University of Picardy, University of Istanbul, and University College of London.

Zohreh Bayatrizi is associate professor of sociology at the University of Alberta, Canada. She received her Ph.D. from the University of British Columbia and is the author of several works about death including a book entitled *Death Sentences: The Modern Ordering of Mortality* and a number of journal articles about the management of death and dying in modern societies both in Europe and in Iran.

Roberta Bonetti is an anthropologist. She received her Ph.D. in religious studies, social sciences, and history and in *Anthropologie sociale, ethnographie et ethnologie* from the University of Bologna together with École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales of Paris. She teaches Museum Anthropology, Applied Anthropology, and Anthropology of Education at the University of Bologna and Anthropology of Design at the Italian School of Design in Padua. She conducts studies and researches in the field of learning processes in educational context and on other social complex organizations. She has published articles on the topics of anthropology of art and on funeral rituals in international journals.

Cristina Casillas has been a high school teacher for 25 years. She specialized in researching the genealogy of how the programmes for teaching thinking became so popular in Mexico in order to point at the multiple consequences of their existence and application. She continues her research and praxis in teaching social sciences such as geography, history, and economy and how the new generations are constructing their learning with and without the use of new technologies.

Yuk Wah Chan is associate professor in the Department of Asian and International Studies at City University of Hong Kong. Her areas of research cover international migration, borderland, tourism, Vietnam–China relations, identity, death, and food. She is one of the series editors of the Routledge series on Asian Migration and is on the editorial board of the Asian Borderlands Book Series (Amsterdam University Press). She is author of *Vietnamese–Chinese Relationships at the Borderlands: Trade, Tourism and Cultural Politics* and has published a few volumes on Asian migration.

Deborah Durham is currently at Longwood University in Virginia, USA. She has undertaken research in Botswana since 1986, focussing first on cultural identity and civic liberalism in a Herero community, and then on discourses of youth in Botswana, about which she has published many articles. More recently, she has worked on ideas about adulthood and self-development, in the context of growing consumerism and an entrepreneurial ethic in Botswana. She is the co-editor of *Generations and Globalization: Youth, Age, and Family in the New World Economy* and *Figuring the Future: Globalization and the Temporalities of Children and Youth*, both with Jennifer Cole, and *Elusive Adulthoods: The Anthropology of New Maturities*, with Jacqueline Solway.

Hajar Ghorbani obtained a master's degree in art studies from the University of Art in Tehran, Iran, in 2017. Her master's thesis was "From Death to Martyrdom: A Cultural Analysis of Visual Elements in the Martyr's Lot of Tehran's Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery." She is currently working on a paper on the politics of martyrdom in Iran.

Joris Gielen is director of the Center for Healthcare Ethics at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His research focusses on religion, spirituality, and ethics in palliative care from a global perspective. He has conducted research projects in Belgium, the USA, and India. A special area of interest is the role of religion in the experiences of patients, their family members, physicians, and nurses in palliative care in North India. Currently, he is collaborating on a project sponsored by the Indian Council of Medical Research that aims at developing a scale to measure spiritual distress in Hindi-speaking palliative care patients in India.

Merryn Gott has been conducting research relating to palliative care for over 20 years in New Zealand with a particular focus on promoting equity at end of life. She directs the Te Ārai Palliative Care and End of Life Research Group:

https://tearairesearchgroup.org. The group conducts multidisciplinary bicultural research using creative social research methods to inform practice, policy, and teaching in palliative and end-of-life care both nationally and internationally.

Marisete T. Hoffmann-Horochovski is a Doctor in Sociology at the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR) (2008) and a Professor at the UFPR in the Post-Graduation Program of Sustainable Territorial Development and the Professional Master's Course in Sociology. Her research includes themes related to the sociology of health, public policies, ageing, and death.

Komal Kashyap is working as a physiotherapist at the Department of Onco-Anaesthesia and Palliative Medicine of the Dr. B R Ambedkar Institute Rotary Cancer Hospital of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi. There, she is also working on a 3-year research project on spirituality in patients suffering from cancer-related pain. Currently, she is completing a doctoral dissertation on the efficacy of Scrambler Therapy for the management of pain and quality of life in cancer patients. She has co-authored several studies on pain management in cancer patients through therapies such as yoga and Scrambler Therapy.

Andrew B. Kipnis is professor of Anthropology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His recent books include *From Village to City: Social Transformation in a Chinese County Seat* (University of California Press 2016), *Contemporary China: Society and Social Change* (with Tamara Jacka and Sally Sargeson, Cambridge University Press 2013), *Chinese Modernity and the Individual Psyche* (ed., Palgrave Macmillan 2012), and *Governing Educational Desire: Culture, Politics, and Schooling in China* (University of Chicago Press 2011). For 10 years, with Luigi Tomba, he was co-editor of *The China Journal*.

Christien Klaufus (c.j.klaufus@cedla.nl) is an assistant professor of Human Geography at the Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation at the University of Amsterdam. Christien specializes in urban studies, while her geographical focus is on the Andean region. She holds a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology and an M.Sc. in architecture. She is the programme manager of *Deathscapes in Latin American Metropolises*. She is the author of *Urban Residence* (Berghahn, 2012) and the co-editor of *Housing and Belonging in Latin America* (Berghahn, 2015). She has published widely on urban development and urban design issues in international journals.

Frédéric Laugrand is a professor in the Department of Anthropology, Université Laval, Canada, and editor of the journal *Anthropologie et Sociétés*. He is the author of *Mourir et renaître. La réception du christianisme par les Inuit de l'Arctique de l'Est canadien* (PUL/CNWS 2002). With J. Oosten he co-edited many books for different collections of Nunavut Arctic College: *Interviewing Inuit Elders, Inuit Perspectives on the Twentieth Century*, and *Memory and History in Nunavut*. He is also a co-author (with J. Oosten) of *The Sea Woman* (University of Alaska Press

2009), *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity: Transitions and Transformations in the Twentieth Century* (MQUP 2010), and *Hunters, Predators and Prey: Inuit Perceptions of Animals* (Berghahn Books 2014).

Raymond L. M. Lee had previously taught sociology at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. He is presently a non-affiliated researcher of modernity and mortality. His writings on death and the afterlife have appeared in *Illness, Culture & Loss, Journal of Contemporary Religion, Journal of Near-Death Studies, Mortality, Time & Society,* and *BSA Sociology*.

Natalia Luxardo is a social worker. She received her Ph.D. in social sciences from the University of Buenos Aires. She is an associate professor at the Career of Social Work (University of Buenos Aires) and an independent researcher at Gino Germani Research Institute and the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET), Argentina.

Kathleen Mason is a research assistant in the School of Nursing, Faculty of Medicine, University of Auckland for Pae Herenga: An investigation of Māori family end of life cultural care customs, in New Zealand. She is of Rongowhakaata and Ngāti Porou descent. She is also a member of the Te Ārai Palliative Care and End of Life Research Group. She has a Bachelor of Health Science in Māori Health from Massey University.

Gordon Mathews is professor and chair in the Department of Anthropology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He has written *What Makes Life Worth Living?: How Japanese and Americans Make Sense of Their Worlds* (1996), *Global Culture/Individual Identity: Searching for Home in the Cultural Supermarket* (2001), *Ghetto at the Center of the World: Chungking Mansions, Hong Kong* (2011), and *The World in Guangzhou: Africans and Other Foreigners in South China's Global Marketplace* (2017), among other books. He is now writing a book on senses of life after death in the USA, Japan, and China.

Tess Moeke-Maxwell is a research fellow for the Te Ārai Palliative Care and End of life Research Group, School of Nursing, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland, New Zealand. She is of Ngāi Tai and Ngāti Porou descent. Tess leads qualitative Kaupapa Māori and Māori-centred research with indigenous New Zealanders at end of life. Tess is the principal investigator on Pae Herenga: An investigation of Māori family end of life cultural care customs. Tess and her colleagues are committed to translating their research findings into visual resources to influence better end-of-life outcomes for Māori families.

Giap Binh Nga is in the Faculty of Psychology and Pedagogy, Hanoi National University of Education. He received his double B.A. degrees from the Hanoi National University of Education and M.A. and Ph.D. from the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Munich, Germany. He received the Outstanding Young

Teacher Award from the Vietnam National University, Hanoi, and the Campaign medal of the Vietnam Psychology Association. His empirical research focusses on divergent thinking in creative learning and innovative teaching, especially the effects of problem-based learning on the creative thinking abilities of students. His current research is on Vietnamese cultural values.

Sihawukele Ngubane is a professor of IsiZulu Language Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He is a linguist, author, and cultural activist. He studied at Adams College, University of Zululand (Ongoye) and the former University of Natal. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts Honours, a master's degree, and Doctor of Philosophy specializing in Onomastics. Professor Ngubane is a member of numerous organizations such as Usiba Writers Guild, Academic and Non-Fiction Authors' Association of South Africa, African Languages Association of Southern Africa and Dramatic, Artistic and Literary Rights Organisation (Pty) Limited (DALRO), African Renaissance Trust and chairs the Royal Household Trust, and Adams College Development Trust.

Dr. Morufu Bukola Omigbule attended Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, for his undergraduate and postgraduates. He teaches courses in Literature in English. His research interest is in fields related to African literature and African cultural studies. He is a member of reputable academic professional associations. He has published academic papers in reputable local and international journals. He is an African Humanities Program fellow of American Council of Learned Societies.

Henri Oripeloye (Ph.D.) teaches literature in the Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. His areas of research include modern African poetry, cultural studies, and life writing (email: oripeloyehenri@gmail.com).

Jacek Jan Pawlik is professor of Cultural Anthropology, Department of Family Science at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland. He focusses his research on African cultures moving from ritual studies in traditional environment to urban anthropology. His main field of study is Togo in West Africa. He has published articles on ritual, family, poverty, religion, politics, and embodiment. His last book *Twórcza codzienność mieszkańców Lomé* (Olsztyn 2018) explores the everyday life situations in the capital of Togo showing the creative capacity of its inhabitants. His studies foster deeper understanding of African cultures for holistic human development.

Robert M. Rakoff is emeritus professor of politics and environmental studies at Hampshire College. He received his B.A. from Oberlin College and an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Washington in the USA. His teaching and research interests include environmental history and policy, the politics of land use, US welfare policy, the cultural construction of nature, creative nonfiction writing about the outdoors, and the political economy of farming and rural life.

José Miguel Rasia has a doctorate from the University of Campinas – São Paulo (UNICAMP) – 1987. Senior Professor of Sociological Theory and Sociology of Health at Federal University of Paraná (UFPR). Leader of the Research Group of Health Sociology – UFPR/CNPq (National Council of Science and Tecnology). Member of the Brazilian Society of Sociology.

Javier Roberti has studied modern languages and psychology and is now a Ph.D. candidate in social sciences. His research interests are chronic diseases and the mechanisms through which healthcare practices are embedded in social contexts. He regularly publishes research and works with healthcare groups.

Clara Saraiva is a senior researcher at the Centre for Comparative Studies in Lisbon, University of Lisbon. Her main fields of research deal with religion and ritual, drawing especially on the conceptions and practices of death from a cross-cultural perspective (USA, Portugal, Guinea-Bissau, immigrants in Portugal). She is president of the Association of Portuguese Anthropology (APA), a board member of the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA), and former vice president of the Society for International Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF).

Helaine Selin was a faculty associate and science librarian at Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA, from which she retired in 2012. She is the editor of the *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures* (3rd ed. Springer 2016) and seven books in Springer's Science Across Cultures series on Astronomy, Mathematics, Medicine, Nature, Childbirth, Parenting, and Happiness.

Nguyen Duc Son is associate professor in Faculty of Psychology and Pedagogy, Hanoi National University of Education, and vice president of Vietnam Social Psychology Association. He has been conducting research in social psychology and personality psychology and has been involved in studies on Vietnamese students' and teachers' personalities. His publications focus on children's personality traits and parents' attitude on their education.

Chee-Kiong Tong is special academic advisor and chair professor at Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). Before joining UBD, he held various positions at the National University of Singapore, including dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, director of the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences, and professor of Sociology. He obtained his master's and Ph.D. from Cornell University, USA. His research interest focusses on the Chinese in Southeast Asia. His publications include Chinese Death Rituals, Rationalizing Religion: Religious Conversion, Revivalism, and Competition in Singapore Identity and Ethnic Relations in Southeast Asia and Chinese Business.

Frances Toohey is a research assistant for Pae Herenga: An investigation of Māori family end of life cultural care customs, in the School of Nursing, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland, New Zealand. She is of Ngāti Kahu ki Whangaroa descent. She is also a member of the Te Ārai: Palliative Care and End of Life Research Group. She is a medical student with a background Public Health.

Eric Venbrux is professor of Comparative Religion and director of the Centre for Thanatology at Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands. He conducted anthropological fieldwork among the Tiwi people of Australia, as well as in Switzerland and the Netherlands. His research interests are in local religion, ritual change, material culture, and the verbal and visual arts. He is the author of *A Death in the Tiwi Islands: Conflict, Ritual and Social Life in an Australian Aboriginal Community* (1995) and co-editor of *Exploring World Art* (2006), *Rituele Creativiteit* (2008), *Ritual, Media, and Conflict* (2011), *Changing European Death Ways* (2013), and *Consolationscapes in the Face of Loss* (2018) and special journal issues. He has written numerous articles and chapters on mortuary ritual.

Andrea C. Walker is a professor of Professional Counseling at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her research efforts have focussed on grief and bereavement-related issues across the life span, particularly for American Indian groups, with special focus on the role of spirituality, religiosity, and environment in those issues. She has also assisted in research associated with community connectedness and compassion, as part of her role as commissioner, Tulsa Human Rights Commission, in recent years. She is a licensed alcohol, drug, and mental health counselor (LADC/MH) in Oklahoma, and she has developed and taught several addiction-related courses.

Rawiri Wharemate is a cultural advisor for the School of Nursing, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland, New Zealand. He is of Tainui, Ngātiwai, Ngāpuhi and Kawreau descent. He provides cultural leadership on the Pae Herenga project. He has contributed to Māori health development for many years. He provides cultural advice to academics across numerous health-related fields.

The Evolution of Funerary Ritual in Urbanizing China

Andrew B. Kipnis

Abstract The People's Republic of China has been urbanizing rapidly over the past four decades and this urbanization has had significant impacts on funerary rites and the ways in which people memorialize the dead. Urbanization in China has been accompanied by the growth of the cemetery industry, the establishment of new occupations in funerary related services and the creation of educational institutions to produce workers for these occupations, as well as a rise in the importance of Qing Ming as a national holiday, new forms of memorialization, and shifting conceptions of familial belonging. Subtle changes in beliefs about the soul, the afterlife and the place of religion in funerary ritual may also be occurring.

Keywords Urbanization · Cemeteries · Funerary ritual · China · Memorialization

Chinese funerary ritual has long been influenced by the examples set and the regulations implemented by the central government. Historically, while many Buddhists encouraged cremation (perhaps relating to the origins of Buddhism in India), Confucianists saw cremation as evil and demanded burial. Successive imperial dynasties in China, from the Song dynasty to the Qing (960–1911), imposed severe penalties for cremation (see Mueggler 2017: 39–41), By the late imperial period, the effects of centuries of imperial pressure had resulted in what James Watson called an "orthopraxy" of funerary practice around the country, though the structure of this orthodoxy still allowed for some local variation (Watson 1988b). The government of the People's Republic of China reversed the ban on cremation by first encouraging and then requiring it for all non-Muslim citizens. Those officially registered as one of China's ten Muslim minorities may be buried without cremation at dedicated Muslim cemeteries. While some parts of the country previously lacked adequate crematoriums, most parts of the country now have access to crematoriums. By 2003, cremation rates for non-Muslim Chinese reached 60% and the rate has

A. B. Kipnis (✉)
Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, Hong Kong
e-mail: abkipnis@cuhk.edu.hk

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_1

continued to rise rapidly since then (Chen and Chen 2008: 265). But during the twenty-first century, the pressures of rapid urbanization and commercialization have had perhaps a greater impact on funerary practice than state regulation. Rates of urbanization in China have reached a level unprecedented in human history and more than half of the population now resides in urban areas. Though funerary rites in rural China are also evolving, the contrast between contemporary rural and contemporary urban areas provides an excellent starting point for understanding the changes the country as a whole is undergoing.

While echoes of the orthopraxy of funerary ritual analysed by Watson can still be seen in many rural contexts, these practices are not simply historical legacies. They continue to make sense in the socioeconomic conditions of contemporary rural China. To a greater extent than urban dwellers, those living in villages know and are often even related to their neighbours. Usually a village elder who is also a relative can be relied upon to organize and direct a funeral and everyone living in the village as well as relatives from outside of the village will be invited to attend. In addition, most households have surface rights to farmland and work to grow crops on it. Consequently, they have access to local land on which to bury cinerary caskets. In regions on the plains, this can be farmland (with burial taking place deep enough not to interfere with farming). In mountainous areas, where some land is not farmed, more permanent graves are often established on non-farming land on the outskirts of villages. While in many rural areas the government is establishing collective graveyards to manage the use of land for burial, the resulting access to graveyards is still relatively local. Consequently, in rural areas, in both life and death, a more intimate relationship between the land, the extended family and the place of dwelling exists.

In urban areas, the kinship/land/gravesite/funerary ritual nexus dissolves. Most people do not live in neighbourhood groupings that are also extended families. When faced with a death in the family, most urbanites have neither the knowledge to arrange a funeral themselves nor a close relative to whom they can turn who has this knowledge. They usually hire a small commercial operator, known as a one-stop dragon because the business covers the process from start to finish, to help them arrange the funeral. In addition to helping with paperwork and offering advice on ritual procedures, these operators act as intermediaries when the household of the deceased interacts with larger state/business entities involved in funerary ritual—the state run funeral homes and the large cemeteries. The cemeteries themselves are generally located far outside the city, so visiting the gravesite cannot be part of one's daily routine. With the exception of relatively famous people, urban funerals are generally closed affairs, with only the households of several close relatives attending.

Since cremation is enforced in many rural areas as well as all urban areas, there are some similarities in funerary procedure across the rural-urban divide. In both rural and urban areas, the ritual generally begins with a corpse dressed in burial clothing and displayed in an open casket, continues with a cremation and the receiving of the ashes in a cinerary casket and ends with the burial of the cinerary casket. In rural China, the body will generally be kept at home for a few days after

death, in a refrigerated casket if the weather is hot. Neighbours and relatives, all of whom would have been notified of the death, will come to pay their respects and various ritual procedures will be observed. After a few days, usually an odd number (3, 5, or 7), the body is taken to a state-run crematorium and the ashes are received in a cinerary casket. The casket is then buried on village land or in a village cemetery in a separate ceremony. In urban areas, the body is usually stored at a state run funeral home after death. Some people set up a home altar in their apartments with a picture of the deceased, and visitors are received. After a few days a farewell ceremony or memorial meeting is held at the state funeral home. The body is displayed in an open casket, a few speeches are given and attendees bow in front of the casket (for depictions of such ceremonies in Shanghai see Bellocq 2012; Liu 2015). After the farewell ceremony, the body is cremated and the family receives the ashes in a cinerary casket. Depending on the urban area and the choices of the family, the ashes may be taken directly to a cemetery for burial in a separate ceremony, or may be stored temporarily at the funeral home until the family can arrange an appropriate grave or another method for disposing of the ashes. In both rural and urban China, religious specialists can be invited to direct procedures or enact rituals at many points in the process, though most people simply rely upon village elders in rural settings and the relatively secular employees of cemeteries, funeral homes, and one-stop dragons in urban areas. In urban areas the major rituals are the farewell ceremony and the burial of the cinerary casket; more minor rituals can take place whenever the body or the ashes are moved, when the body is changed into clothes for burial, and at the gravesite at regular intervals after the burial and on the annual holiday for grave sweeping (Qing Ming, usually on April 5). In rural areas there are rituals held when people visit the body before cremation and at the time of burial, as well as sacrifices performed at gravesites after the ritual. Because of the distance of urban cemeteries from homes, visits to gravesites in urban China are relatively rare, and become special trips. In rural China graveside sacrifices can be incorporated into regular routines.

While the procedures and rituals carried out in rural and urban China form a continuum, in terms of the percentages of people who hold one type of ritual or another, those in the funerary industry often draw the following distinctions between rural and urban funerals. In rural funerals wailing or loud crying is expected and professional wailers can even be employed. In urban funerals loud crying is generally discouraged. In rural funerals, descendants often wear funerary related clothing that identify their relationship to the deceased (*pima daixiao* 披麻戴孝), while in urban funerals all the people who attend wear black armbands regardless of their relation to the deceased. In rural funerals, state-run crematoriums/funeral homes are only places to have the body cremated and not the sites of significant rituals. In urban China, the state-run funeral home is the site of the most significant ritual in the funerary sequence and state aesthetics are usually, but not always or entirely, observed. Urban families can spend much money on flowers to decorate the halls at the farewell ceremony and to purchase a plot in a cemetery. But, rural funerals often involve more people than urban funerals as families in rural China are larger on average and the proceedings are more open to visits by fellow villagers

and other friends and acquaintances of the deceased's family. Relatively wealthy rural families may spend large sums of money to arrange for banquet style meals for all of the guests who visit during the lengthy period before cremation while urban families typically hold one, relatively small banquet at a restaurant only for the close family members who actually attend the burial and farewell ceremony.

The Growing But Stigmatized Profession of Funerary Workers

The funerary industry has been a rapidly expanding sector of business in China. In rural China, people had little need for one-stop dragon entrepreneurs, funeral homes or cemeteries. As China has urbanized, it has also grown more wealthy, so the funerary industry has had a doubled source of growth for four decades: the size of the population living in urban areas is rapidly increasing and the amount of money, per capita, that population has to spend on funerals is also increasing.

Of the dozen urban, one-stop dragon entrepreneurs I have interviewed, ten came from rural areas surrounding the urban area in which they worked. Most came from families that had been involved in arranging funerals in their villages, and brought the specific knowledge from how funerals were arranged in their village to their work. But in advising clients on ritual avoidances and procedures, they also used information garnered from websites and social media, so their sources of information were far from purely local. They also had to adapt their practice to the contingencies of urban life: the paperwork required by urban bureaucracies, the regulations of the funeral homes and the cemeteries, the distance of travel to the funeral homes and cemeteries, and the familial situations of urban residents.

The cemeteries and state-run funeral homes, however, did not usually hire uneducated migrants from rural areas. Instead, they hired graduates of the technical school (*da zhuan* 大专) or now university (*benke* 本科) programs that specialize in training funerary workers. Because funerary work is often stigmatized in China, these graduates also tend to be rural-urban migrants. Their migration, however, has taken the detour of a formal stint at university.

The establishment of tertiary courses for funerary workers began at the Changsha Social Work College (*Changsha Minzheng Zhiye Jishu Xueyuan* 长沙民政技术学院) in 1995.[1] During the 1990s, Wang Fuzi, a history and literature professor with interests in traditional funerary rites, noticed the increasing number of funeral homes and cemeteries in China's rapidly growing urban sector. He visited many funeral homes and cemeteries around the country and, in 1993, wrote a formal report on establishing a course in funerary studies. He received permission to do so

[1] Much of the information in the following paragraphs was derived from interviews. I conducted interviews in Changsha in October 2017, and did research on the funerary sector in Nanjing and Jinan from 2013 to 2016. For a written source on funerary studies at the Changsha Social Work College, see Lu (2015).

at the secondary specialized level (*zhongzhuan* 中专) and took in his first class of almost 100 students in September of 1995. The course added a few specialized classes in funerary ritual, presenting and cremating corpses and funerary business management to a large range of general education courses in Chinese, English, history, business management and politics. It also arranged for students to do internships at funerary industry businesses during the summer months. In 1999 the teachers of the course were able to organize themselves into a separate department and in 2000 they upgraded the course from a specialized secondary course to a specialized tertiary course (*zhongzhuan* to *dazhuan*). In the same year they divided the course into two majors—one in funerary ritual technology and management and one in cemetery design (which covered both the landscape design of cemeteries as a whole and the design of individual tombs and tombstones in different sections of a given cemetery). In 2006 they split up the funerary ritual technology and management major into three separate majors—one in funerary service (*binyi fuwu* 殡仪服务), one in funerary equipment (especially the operation and repair of crematory ovens) and one in embalming and preparing corpses for viewing—to arrive at the present arrangement of four majors in total. In the 20 years between 1995 and 2015, over 5000 students graduated from its courses. The school currently admits close to 350 students per year into its various majors. In 2012, the Department of Funerary Studies was upgraded to the School of Funerary Studies (*Binyi Xueyuan* 殡仪学院) in recognition of the large number of students it was educating. The school is in the process of upgrading the degree from a 3-year tertiary short course into a 4-year university degree. As the first and by far the largest such program in the nation, the School of Funerary Studies has also been active in accrediting other courses around China, as well as providing teaching materials and textbooks for these courses.

The success of the program can be seen in the networks of its graduates around the country. Located in Hunan province, the school gets about half of its students from Hunan and the rest from all over the country. Its graduates have set up formal alumni associations in 27 of China's 32 provinces and act as the top leader or vice leader of more than 300 municipal (government-run) funerary homes across China. Its students have the opportunity to serve as summer interns in more than 20 funeral homes around China. They work at graveyards, funeral homes, crematoria, funeral equipment manufacturers and many have set up their own businesses. Often, alumni in charge of hiring new funerary workers call up the School to try lure students to leave for work opportunities before they even graduate. Those that offer internship opportunities for students from the school often hire their interns after they graduate.

The stigmatization of funerary workers structures the program in contradictory ways. On the one hand, professors in the program argue that by making funerary work into an occupation that requires a university degree, the program raises the "Quality" (*suzhi* 素质) of the people involved in funerary work. Suzhi is a key concept in contemporary Chinese society. It refers to a sort of overall physical, mental, social, and moral type of quality that I translate as Quality with a capital Q. The government has dedicated itself to "raising the suzhi" of the population and uses the term in many of its policy documents and propaganda campaigns, especially those

related to educational programs. People often use the term to discriminate against those whom they feel are below themselves, mocking with the term "low Quality." Most people also accept that education raises the Quality of those who attain it (Kipnis 2006, 2007, 2011). So by providing degrees, the program raises both the actual "Quality" and the perception of the "Quality" of its graduates, thereby reducing stigma. On the other hand, despite its desire to reduce stigma, the program owes its existence to and feeds off of the economic implications of this prejudice. Work in the funerary industry is easy to find not only because the sector is expanding, but also because many urban residents fear the stigma associated with the work. For the same reason, salaries and money making opportunities are relatively high. Students who come to the program are often those with very low test scores on the university entrance exam who could not have gained admittance to any other program. They are also often from relatively impoverished rural families and thus find the promise of easy employment after graduation (or in many cases even before graduation) alluring. After graduation, many funerary workers marry other funerary workers so that they will not be subject to stigmatization during familial negotiations over marriage. They also often meet their spouses either at the School of Funerary Studies or through its alumni networks. The school's alumni associations thus become both socially and professionally important to the school's graduates, and the school benefits greatly from the contributions of its alumni.

Speculatively, I would argue that the stigma attaching to funerary workers relates to the dynamics of urbanization itself. When I did research in rural north China during the 1980s, I never found those involved in running or organizing funerals to be stigmatized in any way. They were neighbours and relatives who were lending a hand in a time of need. In that part of China, cinerary caskets were buried on agricultural land, with nothing marking the grave except a temporary mound which would be ploughed under when the next crop was planted. At the appropriate occasions, people would burn some spirit money or make a sacrifice to their ancestors in the middle of their fields. No one worried much about ghosts in the fields (Kipnis 1997). But in the village, both the people doing the funerary work and those being buried were family. In urban settings, not only is the city a society of strangers, but the cemeteries are also full of unknown others. Those working the in funerary industry not only work with the dead of one's own family, but also the dead of complete strangers. In traditional Chinese cosmology, dead spirits who are not treated properly, in either life or death, become malevolent ghosts rather than benevolent ancestors. In urban settings, cemeteries thus become places that are potentially full of ghosts and those that work with dead people are stained with the pollution of ghostly others. James Watson has argued that paid and stigmatised funerary workers were a standardized part of traditional Chinese funerals. But he did his research in a town in peri-urban Hong Kong that was already subject to the pressures of urbanization and modernization (Watson 1982, 1988a). Susan Naquin suggests that in rural North China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, assistance at funerals for the great majority of non-wealthy farming families was provided by unpaid relatives and neighbours rather than paid specialists, while Zhou Shaoming says the same about Eastern Shandong in both the pre- and

post-revolutionary periods (Naquin 1988: p. 54; Zhou 2009: pp. 118, 130, 210). The extent to which urbanization mitigates or exacerbates the stigmatization of funerary workers in urban Chinese settings would be an interesting question for future research.

The Rise of Cemeteries and the Separation of the Dead and the Living

Modern cemeteries, in which unrelated people are buried in a dedicated area, were first established in China in colonial Shanghai during the late nineteenth century. After the communist revolution, most urban areas built cemeteries for political martyrs and communist heroes, but there were few places for the burial of ashes of common people. Political restrictions during the Maoist era meant that many urban people were forced to scatter the ashes of their relatives, or even allow them to be used as building materials. During the reform era (post-1978), the cemetery business began again, with some of the first new cemeteries opening on the outskirts of Shanghai in the mid-1980s (Aveline-Dubach 2012). Since then most large Chinese cities have built cemeteries, usually well outside of the main urban areas. Often, large private companies establish joint ventures with local Chinese governments. These joint ventures typically attract advice and funding from other East Asian countries and use the connection with local government as a form of political protection, as large, land-intensive industries are both highly visible and subject to Chinese land-ownership regimes, which prevent the full privatization of land holdings. At present, many large Chinese cities are restricting the establishment of new cemeteries, and trying to encourage people to dispose of funerary ashes in less land intensive ways, such as in columbarium, though most Chinese urbanites prefer to bury ashes in cemeteries.

The cemeteries that have already been established have proven to be highly profitable businesses. Land values have skyrocketed in urban China and the price of burial plots has risen just as rapidly. The largest and perhaps most famous company creating cemeteries in China is Fu Shou Yuan. They started off building a large cemetery on the outskirts of Shanghai and have since established cemeteries on the outskirts of large cities in ten other provinces (Fu Shou Yuan International Group 2018). In Shanghai, their cemetery includes an onsite Buddhist temple, dedicated places for communist martyrs and war heroes (see Fig. 1), and a museum with displays about famous Shanghai people who have passed away, including a large number of communist martyrs. The company makes most of its profits by selling customized burial plots with customized tombstones for very wealthy clients, though it also has a columbarium and sections reserved for relatively impoverished customers (Fu Shou Yuan International Group 2018). This combination of services allows it both to demonstrate its dedication to the Communist Party and to satisfy wealthy customers.

Fig. 1 Communist soldiers memorialized in cemetery

Contemporary Chinese cemeteries separate spaces for the living from spaces for the dead. Unlike rural villages, where ancestors are buried in the fields where people work and near to where they live, urban cemeteries are located far outside the central areas of the city. They often take over an hour to reach, even if one drives one's own car. On key holidays for remembering the dead, such as the Qing Ming festival (April 5), traffic jams make travel to the cemeteries an even lengthier proposition. This distance both separates the living from the dead and makes visiting the dead more of a special occasion than an everyday occurrence. The separation of the living from the dead extends to state-run funeral homes as well. City governments locate their (state-run) funeral homes on the outskirts of town. As cities expand, some funeral homes can come to be located in relatively central districts, but in such cases municipal governments often relocate their funeral homes to more distant locations. One of the reasons for locating funeral homes and cemeteries away from the city centres is that they tend to depress the property values of the real estate around them, and urban governments in China rely on high property values for their financial liquidity. Shanghai is one city where a couple of funeral homes are located in what have become relatively central districts, but unlike most Chinese urban areas, these funeral homes do not have their own crematoria, which have been moved to the outskirts of the city. In addition, these funeral homes are well hidden from the streets. Maylis Bellocq suggests that death has become completely invisible in contemporary Shanghai (Bellocq 2012). All of the activity related to death occurs either behind closed doors or far away from the city centre. While Bellocq and others emphasize the restrictive policies of the Communist Party as an important factor behind this invisibility, I would suggest that this invisibility also relates to the dynamics of urbanization. The mixture of strangers with family among the living in urban contexts leads to the mixture of ghosts and ancestors among the dead. Since

this mixture is frightening, popular sentiment shuns locations, businesses and people who deal with the dead and property prices near cemeteries decline. Governments sensitive to these issues attempt to remove dealings with death from the city. Philippe Ariès has made a similar observation for Western countries (Aries 1983).

But if cemeteries can be frightening places, they are also places of memorialization, remembrance, sacrifice and sometimes even joyous family outings. As China has urbanized, Qing Ming has become a more important holiday. While it has long been an occasion for "sweeping graves" (*saomu*, i.e. cleaning and tidying up tombstones and carrying out simple ancestral sacrifices at gravesites), when graves were located close to the home these activities were relatively routine. They could be done by a single person in the family (often the eldest women able to walk easily), hardly interfered with her daily routine, and were activities that might be carried out on many other days during the year as well. But for people who live in a part of the country that is distant from their home, perhaps even in another country, or even for those who live in the city where they were raised, but whose parents are buried in a cemetery far from the urban centre, visiting the grave becomes a major outing. It is often combined with visits to relatives living in the place where one's parents are buried, or family outings to urban gravesites with siblings, children and spouses.

On Qing Ming, the traffic jams around major cemeteries become so intense that many people elect to do their grave visitations during the weeks before Qing Ming. Even then, on weekend days during the month before Qing Ming, traffic jams are common. Vendors line the streets near the entrance to the cemetery selling flowers and paper votive offerings, including paper spirit money (see Fig. 2; i.e. not actual

Fig. 2 Stall near cemetery selling paper spirit money

Fig. 3 Paper homes and appliances for sale at cemetery

currency, but forms of paper printed to resemble currency which are thought to provide money for the souls of the deceased in the underworld) and paper appliances, houses, cars, furnishings, mahjong tiles, (see Fig. 3) and even maids or prostitutes (see Blake 2011). Families will often buy some flowers and paper offerings and bring some sacrificial food (fruit, rice, steamed bread, or dumplings, and the favourite dishes of the deceased) and sometime liquors and cigarettes for male ancestors. They will clean up the grave a bit, removing any leaves that have fallen on it and pulling up any weeds that are growing near it, though in most newer urban cemeteries, where the graves are bunched together in cement paths, there is little opportunity for weeds to grow. They will lay the food and flowers on the grave and bow or kowtow in front of the grave, usually one at a time in age order. While performing bows, they will often speak to their deceased ancestor, using an appropriate kinship term to address her or him, announcing who they are and perhaps telling the ancestor a bit of family or personal news. They will then take turns burning paper offerings in a bucket (provided by the cemetery at the entrance) that is placed in front of the tombstone (see Fig. 4). Finally, they might give a graveyard attendant a tip in a red envelope and ask him or her to keep the grave clean in the coming year. Afterwards, those who have come by car in family groupings will often go out to a rural restaurant or another rural destination in the vicinity of the graveyard, turning the outing into a day-long event. Those who are not able to visit their ancestor's grave on Qing Ming might hire someone else to do the grave sweeping and sacrifice for them, and many cemeteries have even set up on-line ways of doing so by smartphone.

It is difficult to say exactly what percentage of urban people who visit graves on Qing Ming literally believe that their ancestors are present in another world or that the items burned for them and sacrificially placed on the graves actually do these ancestors any good. But the practice is taken as a display of filial piety and many

Fig. 4 Burning paper offerings in bucket in front of grave

Chinese do believe this virtue is an important one. The link of ancestral sacrifice to filial piety is a delicate issue for the Chinese Communist Party. On the one hand, it wants Chinese adults to take good care of their aging parents as the government fears needing to provide healthcare and significant pensions for all aged people. On the other hand, the Party has long campaigned against spending money on funerary activities and tries to dissociate filial piety from activities devoted to the care of ancestors after their death, constantly repeating the slogan "Thick Care, Thin Funerals" (*Houyang, Bozang*). Nevertheless, cemeteries often claim that they are promoting the virtue of filial piety in their attempts to legitimate themselves in the eyes of the government, and the public itself clearly views proper treatment of deceased ancestors as an outward sign of filial virtue.

Evolving Forms of Memorialization

Over the three decades that cemeteries have been proliferating around urban China, the ways in which the deceased have been memorialized on tombstones has evolved. This evolution reflects both changes in the technological and political environment of the cemetery business and changes in familial relationships and ideas about what constitutes family, which, in turn, are reactions to the urbanization process itself. The graveyards are sites of politics because forms of historical memory are highly politicized in China. The first cemeteries in Maoist China, such as Babaoshan in

Beijing or Gongdeyuan in Nanjing, were devoted to communist political martyrs. Tombstones carry messages that are carved in stone and sometimes include messages that the current regime would like to forget, such as slogans from the cultural revolution. So care is taken in terms of what can be memorialized. Nevertheless, at least until the regime of Xi Jinping (since 2013, during which many cities have banned the establishment of more new cemeteries), expanding numbers of families have been having tombstones carved for their deceased. As the economy has expanded, and the technology for carving tombstones has advanced (at this point tombstones can even be imprinted with two dimensional matrix codes (*erweima*) which enable visitors to download a history of the deceased on a smartphone), the costs of this form of memorialization have become easier to bear.

The most common forms of carving on tombstones are the names of the deceased, their dates of birth and death, and the names of the descendants of the deceased, or, if the deceased did not have children, the relatives who paid for the tombstone as well as those who are imagined as mourning the person whose ashes are buried there. Most graves in Chinese urban cemeteries are for married couples. The husband's name is usually written vertically on the right side (from the point of view of one facing the tombstone) and the wife's on the left, which places the husband in the upper position in terms of traditional Chinese etiquette of receiving guests. The descendants' names are usually etched in the left hand side of the tombstones and the dates of birth and death on the right. Daughters and sons, daughters-in-law and sons-in-law, as well as the grandchildren of both daughters and sons are usually all included in the lists of descendants. In many graveyards, (at least in the cities of Nanjing and Jinan, where I did most of my research), all of the living people had their etched names painted in red, while the names of the deceased are painted in red black In addition, the surnames of the deceased are painted in red while their personal names are painted in black (see Fig. 5).

Fig. 5 Tombstone for couple with surnames and still living in red

Several ideas about family structure are indicated by these practices. First, though there is a nod to patriarchy in placing the husband's name in the superior position, the tombstone as a whole reveals a bi-lateral structure of descent rather than a patrilineal one. Daughters and sons and their spouses and children all have their names engraved. Women are referred to by their natal surnames. Painting the surnames in red suggests that the families live on even though the individuals perish. It also frames the deceased's life as a contribution to the family. But since the women have their natal surnames painted in red, they are framed as having contributed primarily to their natal families rather than the families of their husbands. Finally, burying couples together suggests that marriage itself is an institution that lasts forever. This emphasis on bilateral descent and conjugality contrasts sharply with the overwhelming emphasis on patrilineal descent and father-son relationships in the lineage halls and the lineage graveyards that predominate in some rural areas today as well as the whole of the pre-modern era (for one influential view on the rise of conjugality in China see Yan 1997, 2003).

Other traces of patriarchal practice are visible in cemeteries, but these too are evolving. For example, some graves will have places for a husband and two or more wives (either because the husband married before 1949 when polygyny was legal, or because the first wife passed away and the man remarried) as well as the names of the children and grandchildren by both marriages (see Fig. 6). However, on my extensive tours of cemeteries, I never saw a tombstone with the name of a woman and both of her husbands, even though women are almost as likely to remarry after the death of their spouse as a man. So a family can be imagined as including all of the children related through a single man, but not all of the children related through a single woman. To memorialize a woman as having had sexual relationships with more than one man would seem, if not scandalous, at least a bit beyond what should displayed in public. But though these patterns reveal a certain gender imbalance in

Fig. 6 Tombstone for a man and two wives

the imagining of family relationships, my surveys of tombstones in Nanjing graveyards reveal that the percentage of tombstones with a man and two wives is declining over time, so this particular form of imbalance is declining in significance (for more on evolving patterns of patriarchy in China see Harrell and Santos 2017).

A relatively new aspect of imagining families through mourning are the tombstones devoted to childless and unmarried people, including both those that die as adults and those who die as children. There was little place for such people in traditional patrilineal lineage halls and graveyards, where only those who produced descendants for the patriline were memorialized. In contemporary graveyards, one can easily locate tombstones for adults without descendants. Often their tombstones will mention the name of their spouse if they were married, or those of brothers or sisters as well as cousins and nieces and nephews. Some cemeteries also have entire sections reserved for people who die as children (see Fig. 7). Childhood deaths are, of course, serious tragedies for the parents and extended families of deceased children, and such families sometimes choose to express their grief through elaborate tombstones, with carvings of childhood images or toys or books as well as the names of all the people who had loved and cared for the child. In some rural areas, families also attempt to arrange a dead child of the opposite sex to be buried with their child so that their child can be considered to be married in the afterlife, but this practice is illegal. In either case, but especially for those who purchase elaborate tombstones, the elevated position of children in contemporary Chinese society is evident, reflecting what Yunxiang Yan calls descending familism (Yan 2016). As China has experienced a relatively rapid demographic transition, in line with the experience of other rapidly modernizing East Asian societies but perhaps slightly accelerated by the Communist Party's birth control policy, children have become the centre and focal point of most familial relations.

Fig. 7 Section in elite cemetery for children, just after Qing Ming

In most urban graveyards, tombstones record little more than family relationships, but in the most upscale of graveyards, many tombstones have lengthy depictions of the deceased's career, as well as carvings, like a book for a scholar or a rifle for a military man, that suggest something about that career. Many upper class graveyards have separate sections for military men, scholars, or doctors. Some of these graveyards, like the Shanghai Fu Shou Yuan depicted above, also have sections devoted to communist heroes, or historically originated as graveyards dedicated solely to communist martyrs. In such graveyards, there are also more plots and gravestones which are devoted to individuals rather than married couples. On some gravestones there might not even be a single mention of the deceased family, and no names other than that of the deceased. These tombstones suggest the growth of an increasing individualism in China, at least among those whose families are wealthy enough to afford a plot in an expensive cemetery and for deceased people who were fortunate enough to have a career rather than simply a rotten job that helped them support their family.

In both elite and non-elite cemeteries, carvings on the back of tombstones might suggest that the soul of the deceased should last forever. There are a wide range of beliefs in which such a saying may be framed, including Buddhist notions of Western Paradise, Buddhist philosophies of reincarnation, Christian ideas about heaven, Daoist ideas about life energy and immortality, and even secular ideas about the spiritual legacy of the deceased, which can be embodied by others who wish to continue the legacy of this spirit (see Kipnis 2017). While the ambiguity of such sayings fit a wide variety of beliefs, sometimes conflicts about religious beliefs come to the fore in the process of arranging funerals, especially if there are religious divides within the family or between the deceased and his or her descendants (see, for example, Colijn 2016; Liu 2015). Religious devotion can be expressed by placing a cross or other religious sign on the tombstone or during the funeral itself, when choices have to be made about the type of clothing the deceased will wear when displayed in the casket and cremated, the person who is placed in charge of the ceremony and many of the words spoken and practices enacted during the ceremony itself. Communist Party members are generally prohibited from having any religious symbols at their funerals.

Conclusion

While Chinese funerary practice has been influenced by government policy, perhaps a greater source of change in funerary practice have been the dynamics of urbanization. Urbanization makes land rarer and more expensive, creates a society in which strangers are more numerous than kin, affects both the imagination of one's family as well as the groupings of people one considers to be close relatives, and turns the management of funerals into a specialized career rather than a familial responsibility. While China has had urban areas for a long time, and while the late nineteenth and the first eight decades of the twentieth century did see some further

urbanization, it is really only since 1980 that China has urbanized rapidly. But these past four decades have been marked by near record rates of urbanization, and the society as a whole has been transformed from a predominately rural one to a predominately urban one.

The rapid urbanization of China has led to the rise of several forms of funerary related commercial enterprises. These include cemeteries, state-run funeral homes, and small private businesses that help to coordinate the entire complicated process. The rise of these industries has in turn led to new educational programs that train people for funerary professions, as well as the stigmatization of those who work in the industry. The removal of death from urban areas have also given rise to new practices of memorialization, including a rise in the importance of the Qing Ming Festival itself. Religious aspects of mourning, while still important, show trends towards individualization and the remembrance of people as those who have left a spiritual legacy in the world rather than as ancestral beings living in another universe, who nonetheless have an influence on this one.

References

Aries, P. (1983). *The hour of our death*. New York: Peregrine Books.

Aveline-Dubach, N. (2012). The revival of the funeral industry in Shanghai: A model for China. In N. Aveline-Dubach (Ed.), *Invisible population: The place of the dead in East Asian megacities* (pp. 74–97). New York: Lexington Books.

Bellocq, M. (2012). Dealing with the dead: Funerary rites in contemporary Shanghai. In N. Aveline-Dubach (Ed.), *Invisible population: The place of the dead in East Asian megacities* (pp. 98–122). New York: Lexington Books.

Blake, C. F. (2011). *Burning money: The material spirit of the Chinese lifeworld*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Chen, H., & Chen, S. (2008). *Wuyue Sanzang Wenhua* (Funerary culture in the Wuyue area). Beijing: Huawen Chubanshe (Huawen Publishers).

Colijn, B. (2016). Protestant funerals in contemporary Xiamen: Change, resistance and proselytizing in urban China. *Review of Religion and Chinese Society, 3*(1), 25–52.

Fu Shou Yuan International Group, L. (2018). *Annual results announcement for the year ended December 31, 2017*. Retrieved from https://news.ticker.com.hk/api/news/attachments/20180316/003077795-0.PDF

Harrell, S., & Santos, G. D. (2017). Introduction. In G. D. Santos & S. Harrell (Eds.), *Transforming patriarchy: Chinese families in the twenty-first century* (pp. 3–36). Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Kipnis, A. B. (1997). *Producing Guanxi: Sentiment, self, and subculture in a North China village*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Kipnis, A. B. (2006). Suzhi: A keyword approach. *The China Quarterly, 186*, 295–313.

Kipnis, A. B. (2007). Neoliberalism reified: Suzhi discourse and tropes of neoliberalism in the PRC. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 13*(2), 383–399.

Kipnis, A. B. (2011). Subjectification and education for quality in China. *Economy and Society, 40*(2), 261–278.

Kipnis, A. B. (2017). Governing the souls of Chinese modernity. *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory, 7*(2), 217–238.

Liu, H.-m. L. (2015). *Dying Socialist in Capitalist Shanghai: Ritual, governance, and subject formation in urban China's modern funeral industry.* PhD, Boston University.

Lu, J. 卢. (2015). 现代殡葬教育:二十年 *1995–2015* (Contemporary funerary education: Twenty years, 1995–2015). Changsha: Changsha Social Work College.

Mueggler, E. (2017). *Songs for dead parents: Corpse, text and world in Southwest China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Naquin, S. (1988). Funerals in North China: Uniformity and variation. In J. L. Watson & E. S. Rawski (Eds.), *Death ritual in late imperial and modern China* (pp. 37–79). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Watson, J. L. (1982). Of flesh and bones: The management of death pollution in Cantonese society. In M. Bloch & J. Parry (Eds.), *Death and the regeneration of life* (pp. 155–186). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Watson, J. L. (1988a). Funeral specialists in Chinese society: Pollution, performance and social hierarchy. In J. L. Watson & E. S. Rawski (Eds.), *Death ritual in late imperial and modern China* (pp. 109–134). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Watson, J. L. (1988b). The structure of Chinese funerary rites: Elementary forms, ritual sequence, and the primacy of performance. In J. L. Watson & E. S. Rawski (Eds.), *Death ritual in late imperial and modern China* (pp. 3–19). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Yan, Y. (1997). The triumph of conjugality: Structural transformation of family relations in a Chinese village. *Ethnology, 36*(3), 191–212.

Yan, Y. (2003). *Private life under socialism: Love, intimacy and family change in a Chinese village 1949–1999*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Yan, Y. (2016). Intergenerational intimacy and descending familism in rural North China. *American Anthropologist, 118*(2), 244–257.

Zhou, S. (2009). *Funeral rituals in Eastern Shandong, China*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.

Belief in Karma and *Mokṣa* at the End of Life in India

Joris Gielen and Komal Kashyap

Abstract Karma, the belief that every deed of a living being will have a consequence in this life or in a later one, and *mokṣa,* release from the cycle of death and rebirth, are part of Hindu views on life after death. In this chapter, using anthropological data, we study how these two concepts give direction to the experience of illness and death in two very different contexts. One is Varanasi, where, since ancient times, stories have been told about how dying there leads to *mokṣa,* and the other is a pain and palliative care unit in a tertiary cancer hospital in New Delhi. In religious stories and practices in Varanasi, the focus on *mokṣa* and the end of karmic effects through death in the city created an environment in which the dying were encouraged to accept and embrace death. In the pain and palliative care unit, the belief in karma and *mokṣa* was less decisive in the experience of illness. The concepts were used to give meaning to suffering, but, overall, belief in a God who has the power to cure was much more important. In this way, in the pain and palliative care unit, religious beliefs focused on the current life, while, in Varanasi, the emphasis was on the afterlife. The religious emphasis on cure in the pain and palliative care unit may have made it harder for the patient to accept their upcoming death.

Views on Life After Death in Hinduism

As we set out to study Hindu views and experiences, it is important to bear in mind the tremendous diversity that characterizes Hindu traditions. Hindu texts often contradict each other. Since, in Hinduism, texts of minority Hindu traditions are treated with equal respect as those of more main-stream Hindu traditions it is possible to

J. Gielen (✉)
Center for Healthcare Ethics, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA
e-mail: gielenj@duq.edu

K. Kashyap
Department of Onco-Anaesthesia and Palliative Medicine, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Institute Rotary Cancer Hospital, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, India

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_2

find a supporting Hindu text for nearly any theological position (Brown 1974, p. XVI). Consequently, when we come across philosophical-religious concepts in Hindu texts we should be careful not to generalize these concepts uncritically as necessarily relevant and important for all Hindu traditions. Moreover, Hinduism as a lived reality often differs from what is stated in ancient Hindu texts. Therefore, any study on Hindu views on life after death is, in a way, incomplete if it does not consider or include empirical anthropological research.

A combined analysis of anthropological data and religious texts confirms that the diversity that characterizes Hinduism is also found in views on life after death. Rebirth, or *punarjanma* as it is called in Sanskrit, is a commonly accepted feature of Hindu belief and it is tied to another commonly held belief: karma. Karma is the combined result of a person's actions and their consequences. It implies the conviction that all deeds done by a living being will lead to the accumulation of good or bad karma and will have good or bad consequences. Good deeds will lead to good, pleasurable, or beneficial consequences, while the consequences of bad deeds will be unpleasant. These consequences can be experienced either in the present life or in a future life. In this sense, belief in karma automatically implies the acceptance of rebirth, as it is clear that living beings do not experience the consequences of all their acts in their present life. Sometimes, wicked people seem to prosper in life, while people living moral lives experience suffering. The explanation for such seeming contradictions is that they are either the results of actions in previous lives or that the consequences of the deeds of the current life will be experienced in a future life.

As straightforward as the karma theory may seem, it leaves much scope for ambiguity. Not all living creatures may be reborn on earth after death and, if they are reborn, it may be unclear in what form that will be. Living beings can be reborn as human beings, but also as animals, insects, or plants. They may go to heaven or hell, or become a ghost or *pitṛ* (forefather). The deceased might obtain liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. Such liberation is called *mukti* or *mokṣa* (Justice 1997, p. 33; Parry 1993a, pp. 112–113). *Mokṣa,* too, can be interpreted in myriad ways. To some, *mokṣa* implies becoming part of an all-encompassing soul. Some argue that after death the individual self or *ātman* may become part of the god Śiva. Others believe that *mokṣa* implies a good rebirth. For others, death will be followed by a stay in heaven in the presence of God. Hindus will often speak about God in singular. Most Hindus see God as a singular entity and the numerous gods that are venerated within Hinduism are seen as manifestations of that one divine reality.

The diversity of views on life after death can be explained through the historical evolution of Hinduism. This evolution can be roughly divided into three main periods in which three specific types of religious literature originated. In the period of the Vedas, sages reflected upon the *karma-mārga,* which, then, meant the path of ritual action. When the Upaniṣads were composed, the *jñāna-mārga,* the path of knowledge, was dominant. When the *Purāṇas* came about, the *bhakti-mārga,* the path of devotion, gained influence. Each of these three periods is characterized by a particular view on life after death. In the Vedas, the emphasis is on reaching the world of the forefathers: the *pitṛ-loka.* The deceased would reach this place if he or

she had done the right rituals before death, and more rituals are done after death. In the Upaniṣads, release from the cycle of death and rebirth meant becoming immersed in the all-encompassing Spirit. In the *Purāṇas,* the ultimate destiny is devotion to God in heaven. Obtaining this goal is considered a loving gift of God. In Hinduism, these diverse views on life after death and *mokṣa* that originated in different historical periods have continued to exist alongside each other (Hopkins 1992).

Irrespective of how Hindus intepret *mokṣa,* from a philosophical Hindu perspective, it can be argued that for Hindus it is essential to strive towards *mokṣa* in the current life. It is believed that there are 840,000 life forms – some relying on other sources would even say 8,400,000 – out of which only the human form offers the possibility of *mokṣa.* Every soul or *ātman* is said to have to pass through each of these life forms before obtaining a human form. People who commit egregious sins run the risk of having to start all over again at the very first life form (Justice 1997, p. 145; Parry 1994, p. 167).

While this brief overview of beliefs in life after death in Hinduism does give us some idea about what kind of concepts Hindus use to reflect upon life after death, it tells us relatively little about how these concepts shape Hindus' experience of the world and give meaning and direction to their actions and experiences, especially when they are faced with illness, death, and dying. In this chapter, we will study two different end of life contexts in India and analyze how the beliefs in karma and *mokṣa* give direction to the experience of illness and death. The first context that we will study is that of the north Indian city of Varanasi where – many Hindus believe – *mokṣa* can be obtained just through dying there. The second context is that of a pain and palliative care unit in a tertiary hospital in India's capital, New Delhi. We will see that the beliefs of karma and *mokṣa* can have very diverse effects on Hindus facing illness and death, ranging from acceptance and hopeful expectation to depression and a feeling of having been deserted by God.

Belief in Karma and *Mokṣa* in Varanasi

The current appearance of the historical city of Varanasi is dominated by buildings of less than 400 years old. Most religious buildings were built between 1730 and 1810 (Justice 1997, p. 41). Yet, as per Hindu stories, Varanasi has existed since the very beginning of time. In fact, Varanasi is said to be the place where time itself begun. The cosmos was created at Maṇikarṇikā Ghāṭ, which is situated halfway in between the confluence of the rivers Varaṇā and Asī in the river Ganges. A *ghāṭ* is a series of steps leading into a river. In three similar allegories it is sometimes said that India is the navel of the world, Varanasi the navel of India, and Maṇikarṇikā Ghāṭ the navel of Varanasi (Justice 1997, p. 20; Parry 1993a, pp. 103–121; 1994, pp. 11–13). The direction of the river Ganges also indicates the uniqueness of the city. Along Varanasi, the river flows from south to north. In some Hindu thinking, the south represents the realm of death, while the north refers to rebirth and what comes after death (Parry 1994, p. 22). Much of religious life in Varanasi indeed

focuses on the afterlife, and more particularly *mokṣa.* In Varanasi, the negativity of death is mitigated by the opportunities to *mokṣa* that the city has to offer.

The beliefs of people who come to die in Varanasi and of those caring for them have been described in several anthropological studies. We will describe these data here in order to understand what the beliefs in karma and *mokṣa* mean to these people. We need to emphasize that the views described below are those of a specific group of people who are involved in the care of the dying in Varanasi or have chosen to die there themselves because of religious reasons. The views and experiences should, therefore, not be seen as representative for the whole of Hinduism. The data from the palliative care unit in New Delhi will illustrate this very clearly.

Obtaining Mokṣa Through Dying in Varanasi

Pilgrimages to Varanasi are often characterized by an explicit or implicit emphasis on life after death. This is illustrated by the Pañcakrośī, the pilgrimage way that circles Varanasi and that most pilgrims walk in 5 days. A pilgrim who does this is believed to have encircled the entire cosmos because Varanasi is said to be the abode of all gods in its countless temples; the city metaphorically contains all other important Hindu pilgrimage destinations (Callewaert and Schilder 1997, pp. 9–11; Justice 1997, p. 20; Parry 1993a, p. 110, 1994, pp. 15–17, 70). By undertaking that endeavor, the pilgrims hope to redeem themselves from sin. In line with the belief in karma, the expurgation of sins may have an effect on this life as well as the next, because sins cause negative effects in the form of suffering in this life as well as in later lives. Pilgrims who have freed themselves from sin may therefore hope for prosperity and good fortune in this life, but also benefit after death.

In Varanasi, that benefit after death could very well be *mokṣa,* because, as per a Sanskrit saying, dying in Varanasi leads to *mokṣa: "kāśyāṃ maraṇāṃ muktiḥ"* (Eck 1983, p. 325; Parry 1994, p. 21). There is an inscription dating back to the eight century CE that states that people come from afar to Varanasi to die and obtain *mokṣa* (Eck 1983, p. 80). Many people of course, do not have the luck of dying in Varanasi. Statistics show that the majority of the people who come to Varanasi to die, come from within a radius of 100 km around the city (Justice 1997, p. 119). From a karmic perspective, this may seem unfair towards people who lived highly moral lives or did other good religious works, such as dying in another holy city. To resolve this seeming injustice, Hindus have come up with creative theories. Some claim that people who die in another place of religious significance will be reborn in Varanasi in a next life, thus making it highly likely for them to achieve *mokṣa* in that life (Parry 1993a, p. 110; 1994, p. 21). Some argue that it is actually not absolutely necessary to die in Varanasi, but that karmic benefit can also be obtained if the body is cremated in Varanasi or if the ashes of those who are already cremated are strewn into the river Ganges. Still, others maintain that dying in Varanasi is essential if a person wants to obtain *mokṣa.* By way of compromise, it is sometimes stated

that the lifeless bodies that arrive in the city are not yet really dead. The life spirit will only leave the body at the end of the cremation, when the skull is broken precisely with the aim to enable the life spirit to leave the body. Those whose ashes are strewn into the river Ganges at Varanasi would still be reborn in the city, so that they achieve *mokṣa* in their next life (Justice 1997, p. 21; Parry 1993a, p. 112, 1994, pp. 23–24).

Most views regarding the association between dying and *mokṣa* in Varanasi have some basis in religious literary sources. The main textual resources that inspire these views are the *Bhagavad-Gītā,* the *Rāma-carita-mānasa,* and the *Garuḍa-Purāṇa.* The *Bhagavad-Gītā* is important because many Hindus who die in Varanasi are well acquainted with this text and its position on how death can lead to *mokṣa.* The *Rāma-carita-mānasa,* a Hindi retelling of the famous epic *Rāmāyaṇa* in which the god Rāma is the protagonist, explicitly states that dying in Varanasi leads to *mokṣa.* This text also explains why the name Rāma is important in the pursuit of *mokṣa.* It is said that the god Rāma enables the god Śiva to grant *mokṣa.* The *Garuḍa-Purāṇa* largely consists of a conversation in which Garuḍa, the divine king of birds, asks the god Viṣṇu countless questions regarding death. The text emphasizes the importance of preparation for death and Varanasi is presented as a good place to achieve *mokṣa* (Justice 1997, pp. 156–168). However, these texts do not clearly demarcate the area within which a person must die in order to obtain *mokṣa.* The texts do agree that the eastern bank of the river Ganges falls outside this area. This Bank is considered an extremely unfavorable place to die: those who die there will be reborn as donkeys in a next life. This explains why the western bank of the river Ganges is covered with buildings, while the eastern bank has remained relatively empty (Callewaert and Schilder 1997, p. 12; Justice 1997, p. 16; Parry 1993a, p. 110, 1994, p. 22).

The people who come to Varanasi with the hope of dying there and obtaining *mokṣa* can be divided into two groups. Those who come to live there in old age with the idea of eventually dying there are called *Kāśī-vāsīs,* which literally means "those who dwell in Kāśī," another name for Varanasi. Another group will only come to Varanasi when death seems imminent. They come to the city to take advantage of *Kāśī-lābh,* the "benefit of Varanasi." The *Kāśī-vāsīs* lead an austere life that consists of a daily bath in the Ganges, visiting temples and other religious practices (Eck 1983, p. 329; Parry 1993a, p. 110, b, p. 180, 1994, p. 23). In earlier times, those who came exclusively to Varanasi for *Kāśī-lābh,* were often laid on one of the *ghāṭs*, where they awaited death. This custom has virtually disappeared since the 1970s. The vacant buildings in which the people were dying were increasingly used for other purposes and the police no longer allow people to stay on the *ghāṭs* overnight. Even before these changes happened, there were already initiatives to attempt to give the dying a more comfortable death. The Rāmakṛṣṇa Mission Hospital was founded well over 100 years ago by people who were concerned about the fate of the dying in Varanasi's streets. The founders of the later hospital went around and brought the dying together in one place. Gradually the goals of the institution changed and the home for the dying increasingly became a hospital aiming at cure (Justice 1997, pp. 51–54).

Nowadays, there are two more institutions in the city that are specifically intended for people who come to Varanasi for *Kāśī-lābh:* the *Kāśī-Gaṅgā-lābh-bhavan* and the *Kāśī-lābh-mukti-bhavan.* The *Kāśī-Gaṅgā-lābh-bhavan* is situated on the Maṇikarṇikā Ghāṭ, which is said to be an extremely favorable place to obtain salvation. The institution was founded by two families who wanted to offer poor people a decent place to die. The rules of the house make clear that it is meant for people who are in the final phase of the dying process. That is why, in principle, one is not allowed to stay there for more than 15 days and the vast majority (about 84%) of the people who stay in one of the houses for the dying die there, too (Justice 1997, pp. 59–61, 89). The *Kāśī-lābh-mukti-bhavan* was founded by the Dalmia family from Delhi who intended to help the dying in Varanasi. The institution is close to the Godauliā crossing, the busy center of the city (Justice 1997, p. 63; Parry 1993b, p. 180).

Both institutions are largely free of cost. Only a small fee is charged for cleaning and electricity (Parry 1994, p. 52). Life in these institutions is organized in such a way that the mind of the dying remains focused on God and the prospect of *mokṣa.* Throughout the day, there is *pūjā,* or divine worship. Also, religious songs are sung all day, and regularly water from the river Ganges is offered to the sick. There are readings from the *Rāma-carita-mānasa* and a priest will explain the meaning of the read fragments. In addition, there is also frequent reading from the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. The idea is that through these activities, the dying keep their thoughts constantly focused on God (Callewaert and Schilder 1997, pp. 27–28; Eck 1983, pp. 330–331; Justice 1997, pp. 97–100, 148–149). The family of the dying person is expected to help him or her in this process. The dying person is usually accompanied by four men and one or two women. The four men are required to carry the body in an orderly manner to the cremation place after death. The women take care of the dying as long as they are alive (Justice 1997, pp. 88–89).

The moment someone dies in one of the two homes for the dying, the priests indicate through happy behavior to the family of the deceased that by dying in Varanasi their family member has achieved *mokṣa* and his or her departure is, therefore, a reason for joy. Within a few hours, the body is prepared for cremation and brought to the Maṇikarṇikā Ghāṭ (Justice 1997, p. 105). The belief that dying in Varanasi leads to *mokṣa* and the custom to cremate bodies preferably on the Maṇikarṇikā Ghāṭ, have their origin in a Hindu story about creation. According to this story, the region of Varanasi was created by Śiva and his consort Pārvatī. They also created the god Viṣṇu. The latter dug a water basin, called *kuṇḍa* in Sanskrit, with his disc and filled that with the sweat of his ascetic practices for 50,000 years. This was the time he needed to create the cosmos. When Śiva saw Viṣṇu doing all this he trembled with admiration so that one of his earrings came loose and fell into the water basin. Śiva demanded that, from then onwards, the place would be called *Maṇikarṇikā* (“ear jewel”) and allowed Viṣṇu to make a wish. Viṣṇu requested that the place would grant *mokṣa*. Śiva granted this request and he declared that it would always be *Satya Yuga* for the inhabitants of Varanasi. In Hindu stories, *Satya Yuga* is considered an era of prosperity that, in all other places on earth, has been followed by less prosperous eras. Therefore, the nature of time in Varanasi differs from time

elsewhere (Lannoy 2002, pp. 177–178; Parry 1993a, pp. 103–104, 1994, pp. 13–15). In Varanasi it is not only always *Satya Yuga* because Śiva ordered so, but also because, on the Maṇikarṇikā Ghāṭ, the fires burn continually day and night. The cremations are seen as an offering that renews the cosmos. The cremations ensure that the heat of Viṣṇu's ascetic practices that created the cosmos is constantly revitalized. Therefore, on the *ghāṭ*, creation is continuously repeated and it, thus, always remains the beginning of time (Parry 1993a, p. 105, 1994, p. 32): in Varanasi, time stands still.

Nevertheless, the residents of Varanasi are not blind to reality. Because, despite the fact that time stands still in the city, they notice that they themselves and others age and that the city itself seems to be in decline. That is why many admit that the influence of the *Kali Yuga,* a less prosperous era, has even penetrated Varanasi. A possible solution is found in the assumption that Varanasi itself is not affected by time, but that humans are no longer able to observe the city's real condition. For instance, it is also claimed that the city is in fact floating in the air or of gold, but only persons with divine vision can see this. Others suggest that the real Varanasi is in the heart of the believers. In any case, the worldly Varanasi somehow offers the believers the opportunity to come into contact with a transcendent reality (Parry 1993a, pp. 106–108, 1994, p. 19).

Reconciling Karma and Mokṣa

The belief that time is put on hold in Varanasi is important because it helps to understand how the belief that dying in Varanasi will lead to *mokṣa* can be aligned with the karmic conviction that all deeds will have a consequence. If dying in Varanasi invariably leads to *mokṣa,* that would mean there are no karmic effects after death. How could this be possible? If it is accepted that time stands still in Varanasi, deeds remain without consequence and the eternal karmic principles do not seem to apply. After all, the karma theory presupposes that time persists because otherwise no retribution is possible (Justice 1997, p. 20; Lannoy 2002, p. 178; Parry 1993a, p. 107, 1994, p. 18). If there is no time, there is no retribution and everyone who dies will necessarily achieve *mokṣa.* This means that not only Hindus obtain *mokṣa*, but also Muslims, Buddhists, all animals, and even insects. This, however, presents a problem, for how can justice prevail in the city if saints and criminals obtain the favor of *mokṣa* to the same degree (Eck 1983, pp. 334–336)? Various solutions are offered to solve this problem. Some think that sins will always somehow be redeemed during life and that obtaining *mokṣa* after the death is therefore justifiable. Many more people are of the opinion that people with bad karma will not have the opportunity to die in Varanasi and, thus, only deserving people will die there and achieve *mokṣa*. To this, some people add that mere mortals are unable to judge who is a sinner and who is not, because karma is collected over many lifetimes (Eck 1983, p. 337; Parry 1994, p. 29). Another solution is the so-called *bhairavī yātanā:* the "punishment of Bairava." The god Bairava is said to make sinners who die in

Varanasi pay for all their sins in a fraction of a second. In this way the eternal principles of karma, which imply that no action remains without consequence is unaffected (Callewaert and Schilder 1997, p. 42; Eck 1983, pp. 337–338; Parry 1993a, pp. 114–113, 1994, p. 29). But, in this way, the unconditionality of *mokṣa* after death in Varanasi is no longer tenable. Many believe that there will be no punishment at all in Varanasi (Eck 1983, p. 340). Others are more moderate and claim that death in Varanasi in itself is insufficient to achieve *mokṣa* (Justice 1997, pp. 171–172).

For example, some argue that it is important for the dying person to die with the right state of mind. That is why some say continuous listening to prayers to Rāma should be an important activity of the dying person. It is claimed that Śiva grants salvation by whispering the so-called *Tāraka Mantra* (literally: "the mantra that enables to cross") in the ear of the dying in Varanasi (Justice 1997, p. 75; Lannoy 2002, p. 161). Opinions are divided on the content of this mantra. It is certain that the text of the mantra must be extremely short, since Śiva has to do a lot of other work and thus has no time to lose (Parry 1994, p. 273). Some think the mantra consists of the syllable Om, while others claim that it is "Rāma Rāma" (Callewaert and Schilder 1997, p. 81). Whatever the content of the *Tāraka Mantra* may be, it is said to provide insight into the true nature of reality. In this way, the dying obtain *mokṣa.* It is insight that causes salvation, while death itself is no more than the opportunity for the experience of *mokṣa* (Eck 1983, pp. 333–334).

So, even though *mokṣa* in Varanasi is seen as a gratuitous gift of God, some degree of mental change in the dying person still seems to be required. That change can be brought about by God himself, for instance through the *Tāraka Mantra,* but it can also be nurtured by the environment. From that perspective, we should understand the constant recitation of religious prayers and chants near the dying. The moment of death should be a moment of enlightenment and insight. Since the thoughts at the moment of death are decisive for the nature of the next life, it is advisable that these thoughts are focused on God. Therefore, those who are in the vicinity of a dying person are advised to whisper God's name in his or her ear (Eck 1983, p. 343; Parry 1982, p. 83, 1994, p. 158). Because the dying person continually hears God's name, he or she is more likely to be free from desire for worldly matters at the time of death. Someone who dies tormented by earthly desires must wander for a thousand years in the form of a malevolent ghost. In the houses for the dying in Varanasi, there is always religious singing through a system of loudspeakers in every room or a lecture from one of the sacred scriptures (Parry 1994, pp. 52, 158). Mental preparation for death and the ensuing *mokṣa* can also be stimulated through ascetic practices such as fasting, which is recommended as an excellent preparation for a good death.

Dying the Good Death in Varanasi

The active preparation for a good death by people who come to die in Varanasi and their family members indicates two things. First, it shows that some effort to purify karma remains required even if it is accepted that God will help to achieve *mokṣa.* Second, these practices imply recognition of the fact that death is imminent and needs to be accepted. From this perspective, the promise of *mokṣa* after death may help to cope with and accept an unavoidable death. When death is accepted, the dying and their family members can start preparing for it by making arrangements for a death that would guarantee *mokṣa.* Such a death is called a good death. Since death and cremation are regarded as a sacrifice that renews the cosmos, it is extremely important that the sacrifice is worthy and voluntary. People who have come to an end in a "bad" way do not meet these requirements and are, therefore, not a suitable offering and will not achieve *mokṣa*. It is also important for the family that the deceased has died in a good way. Without the proper rites, the ghost of someone who has died a bad death may seriously harm his or her family (Parry 1994, p. 6). But what, then, is a good death?

In order to understand what a good death is, it may be helpful to first look at its opposite. A bad death is often seen as a death that occurred through accident or a contagious disease. Many also believe that a good death cannot take place until the age of 60 years has been reached (Justice 1997, pp. 190–195). A death before that age is often called *akāl mṛtyu* (premature death), although *akāl mṛtyu* and dying at a young age do not strictly have the same meaning. After all, it is the way of dying that determines whether or not a death should be regarded as *akāl mṛtyu* (Filippi 1996, p. 104; Justice 1997, p. 192; Parry 1982, p. 83, 1993a, p. 117, 1994, p. 162).

Many of the Hindus whose views were described in the anthropological studies saw an association between a bad death and bad karma. A person who dies before his fortieth birthday was said to certainly end up in hell. In that respect, *akāl mṛtyu acquires* meaning in relation to the past life of the dying and, at the same time, reveals their fate after death. It is generally assumed that the moment of death has already been determined from birth. Morally good actions can, however, postpone this moment, while bad deeds have a reverse effect. Of course, such arguments do not always provide comfort for people who have just lost a dear person. They may reject the theory or try to turn their arguments in such a way that they can prove that their friend or family member has died in a good way. For those who die in Varanasi the reasoning is obvious, because a death in this city always leads to *mokṣa* and every death in Varanasi, even at a young age, could, therefore, be regarded as a favor (Filippi 1996, p. 104; Justice 1997, pp. 227–228, 192; Parry, 1982, p. 83, 1994, pp. 162–166).

Because the body must be a worthy offering, a good death can best be described as a death "that is one that occurs at as old an age as possible, free from disease, with an empty stomach, awake and that is expected." (Justice 1997, p. 20) The dying

must be in good spiritual condition, consciously experience their death and maintain control of their body (Justice 1997, p. XV; Parry 1994, p. 158). There are also good and bad places and moments to die. A good death can only be obtained when the dying have fulfilled their earthly duties. A bad death comes unexpectedly and people who die in such a way do not have the chance to fulfill all their worldly obligations. For instance, it is often assumed that a good death can only occur if a man or woman has experienced the marriage of his or her grandsons (Justice 1997, p. XIV; Parry 1994, p. 160).

The religious beliefs in Varanasi are focused on accepting a good death. Accordingly, if persons feel that their time has really come, they must give up their body. If they do not, Death may take a younger relative with him to compensate (Parry 1994, p. 158). It is, therefore, expected of elderly persons that they are not too attached to life.

If elderly people are not supposed to be attached to life and if, through dying in Varanasi, *mokṣa* awaits them after death, we wonder whether such people might consider committing suicide in the holy city. There is evidence indicating that, in the past, people came to Varanasi and committed suicide in order to achieve *mokṣa*. Although most Hindu texts reject suicide, there are sentences in the *purāṇas* and in the epics that seem to condone suicide in the pursuit of *mokṣa*. Nowadays, however, almost all Hindus reject such practices (Justice 1997, pp. 43–45; Parry 1993a, p. 110, 1994, pp. 22–23). Nevertheless, the perception of what constitutes a good death still affects the behavior of those who come to die in Varanasi and makes some forgo the intake of food and liquid early in the dying process. In this way the body weakens. Some claim that the life spirit can leave the body more easily in this manner (Justice 1997, p. 229; Parry 1993a, p. 117, 1994, p. 158). As a result of dehydration and malnutrition due to persistent fasting, the dying tend to lose weight very gradually. The slow and predictable process of decay enables the family to bring the dying to Varanasi just a few days before their death. The people who come to the houses for the dying in Varanasi almost all die shortly after their arrival. Only a few live longer than 17 days in these houses. A significant proportion of people die within the first 24 h of arrival (Justice 1997, pp. 197–200, 207–208). This is, therefore, more a death that is controlled by the dying themselves rather than euthanasia (Justice 1997, pp. 230–232). Such a controlled death is not equated with suicide, even though their fasting might accelerate the dying process from a scientific point of view. Those who think they have come to the end of their lives and wish to die in Varanasi, indicate by forgoing food that they are detached from worldly affairs and that they are willing to offer their bodies as a sacrifice. People who commit suicide, on the other hand, are seen as extremely dependent on desires (Parry 1994, p. 163). For the family, stopping to eat is a sign that their relative is dying. It is claimed that the *ātman* no longer needs food because the person has reached old age. Giving up eating and drinking shows that the final phase of life has started. In the homes for the dying, the sick are not expected to eat, because giving up eating is seen as a sign of their willingness to die. Since it is believed that everyone has to complete their predetermined time on earth, forgoing food is not considered an acceleration of the dying process (Justice 1997, pp. 210–218, 223).

In reality, the transfer of the dying to Varanasi may very well accelerate death, or sometimes even be the direct cause of it. Bad roads and uncomfortable public transit may be a heavy ordeal for a weakened elderly person. Also, in order to reach Varanasi, the treatment of people who were receiving intravenous nutrition or medication in a hospital, has to be interrupted (Justice 1997, pp. 205, 209). To those running the houses for the dying in Varanasi, it does not matter much whether or not the lives of those being brought to them could still be prolonged by medical treatments. What really counts is the willingness to die and the desire to obtain *mokṣa* through dying in Varanasi. The rules of the houses explicitly state that those who wish to be cured by taking medicine should go to a hospital. The only medicine that the dying in the *bhavans* receive is Ganges water and sacred *tulsī* leaves. For many dying people, this is also the only food they take (Eck 1983, pp. 330–331).

This fasting also has the advantage that the body is free of feces at the time of death, so that it is a more worthy offering (Parry 1993a, p. 117, 1994, p. 158). Incontinence after death indicates that the life spirit has left the body via the droppings or urine, which shows that the soul is being severely tested. A doomed life spirit can also leave the body via vomit. The absence of incontinence proves that the life spirit has gone through one of the openings in the head and has therefore reached *mokṣa*. The life spirit of a good person is believed to leave the body through the cranial sutures. Moreover, refusal of food shows that the dying person has become detached from material needs (Justice 1997, p. 230; Parry 1994, pp. 160–161).

Such beliefs create a context in which the upcoming death becomes meaningful and acceptable both to the dying persons themselves as well as their family members and friends. Those beliefs give direction to their experiences and decisions so that death is no longer seen as a fearful end but, rather, as a process towards a better future condition in the form of *mokṣa.* This does not mean, however, that Hindu beliefs in karma and *mokṣa* will always lead to such acceptance of death. As we will see in the next section within the context of modern biomedical care, the attitudes of dying patients can be quite different.

Belief in Karma and *Mokṣa* in Palliative Care

In all realms of healthcare, from neo-natal to geriatric, there are people who die. However, there is one area of healthcare where dying is particularly prominent. That is palliative care. This is obviously not to say that the emphasis of palliative care is on dying. In fact, the whole practice and philosophy of palliative care focuses on life. The aim of palliative care is reduction of suffering so that patients who are facing a life-threatening and often life-limiting illness will experience the best possible quality of life. At the same time, the nature of their illness does confront palliative care patients and their family members with the prospect of death. Their attitudes towards death as well as their experiences of illness may be influenced by religion.

Palliative care was introduced in India in the second half of the 1980s. Since then, palliative-care programs have been developed, although coverage of palliative care

in India still remains a huge problem. Most of these programs focus on cancer patients (International Observatory on End of Life Care 2007; Rajagopal and Palat 2002; Shanmugasundaram et al. 2006). In India, palliative care is mainly provided at home by professional palliative-care teams, and trained volunteers and in hospices, pain clinics and palliative-care units in hospitals (International Observatory on End of Life Care 2007; McDermott et al. 2008; Seamark et al. 2000; Shanmugasundaram et al. 2006). Organizations providing palliative care in India rely on various sources of funding and generally the charges made to patients for palliative care are limited.

Below, we will describe how Hindu patients in one of these palliative care settings in India experienced their illness and how religion influenced their attitudes and experiences. In 2012, we undertook a year-long ethnographic study at the pain and palliative care unit of the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Institute Rotary Cancer Hospital of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi to collect evidence regarding the ways in which Indian advanced cancer patients deal with diagnosis and poor prognosis. This pain and palliative care unit differs from a hospice in which dedicated palliative care professionals, supported by some volunteers, provide high quality care to the terminally ill, who come to the hospice in the last weeks or days of their life and usually stay there until their death. The pain and palliative care unit at the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Institute Rotary Cancer Hospital, is a hospital unit where patients usually only stay until their pain and symptoms have been satisfactorily controlled so that the patients can go home. From then onwards, the patients will receive care through the pain clinic or from a home care team. Patients with high care needs at the very end of their life may be advised to go to a hospice.

In our study, we were not so much interested in numerical data, but instead focused on the patients' narratives. We undertook interviews of 31 patients and collected data through participant observation. This meant that relevant information was gathered through observation of and participation in the interaction between patients, their relatives, physicians and nurses.[1] Through these interactions, we obtained a complete picture of the mental, social and physical problems faced by the patients and their relatives. All patients in this study were suffering from cancer-related pain and other symptoms and many of them had a limited life-expectancy (i.e. a few months or less) although not all of them were aware of that. We observed that among patients in Indian palliative care there are four ways of dealing with diagnosis and prognosis: suppression, denial, hope, and acceptance. Religious beliefs directly or indirectly played a role in all four. This diverse influence of reli-

[1] In between observations, field notes were made. These notes were further elaborated and completed after the day's visit to the palliative care unit. All notes were entered into MAXQDA 12, a program for qualitative data analysis (http://www.maxqda.com/). For data analysis, we applied conventional content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Data collection and analysis progressed simultaneously. We identified key concepts in the data and added codes. Through constant comparisons, we determined categories and clarified associations between categories. This process enabled us to develop a clear picture of how the studied patients and their relatives experience disease and how religious concepts and ideas influence these experiences.

gion in palliative care provides an interesting contrast with death beliefs in Varanasi that focus on karma and *mokṣa* and are intended to guide the dying persons towards acceptance or an active embrace of death. Such religiously motivated acceptance is not entirely absent in palliative care, but it is less common. In what follows, we will describe the four responses to diagnosis and prognosis and, then explain how religion influences them. In order to protect the anonymity of the patients, we replaced their names with fictitious names.

Four Responses to Diagnosis and Prognosis

The four ways in which the patients reacted to diagnosis and prognosis – suppression, denial, hope and acceptance – differ from the five stages of grief that Elisabeth Kübler-Ross famously described in her book *On Death and Dying* (1969): denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. This does not mean that Kübler-Ross' insights are not helpful in understanding how palliative care patients in India respond to bad news. We should be aware that Kübler-Ross came to her five stages based on her observations of North American patients. In order to understand the views and experiences of palliative care patients in India, a slightly different framework may be more effective (Gielen 2014), especially if we want to understand the importance of particular religious beliefs, such as karma and *mokṣa,* on these patients.

Suppression or avoidance means that the patient actively attempts not to think about the illness and its consequences. This is not always possible, because pain and other symptoms often force patients to face their disease. The case of Ambika illustrates this. She was 32 years old at the time of the study and suffered from chondrosarcoma (a kind of bone tumor). She testified that she tried to remain happy and cheerful, for instance by watching serials on TV, but soon, she said, "the reality irritates." This made it impossible for her to focus on the program. Shweta, a patient who was 29 years old and was diagnosed with soft-tissue sarcoma of the pelvis with metastases in the lungs and brain, told about her approach. "I don't take stress. I don't think about the future." And generally, this was true, although she, too, could not entirely avoid thinking of the future. When that happened, she used to shift to denial.

Denial occurs when a patient disagrees with the physicians regarding diagnosis and prognosis. When patients are told that they are terminally ill and have a limited life-expectancy, they may find it hard to come to terms with this new reality. Therefore, they may prefer to believe that their physician has made a mistake; or they may convince themselves that they have not heard or understood what the doctor has said, or even misconstrue the doctors' words. For instance, Shweta once said, "My chance to get fully cured is 60%." Her medical file told otherwise, and it never became clear whether anyone had really told her that she could get cured. However, the doctor in charge of the palliative care unit had directly informed her that her condition was incurable. Denial almost never occurred on its own. It was

closely connected with hope and the level of acceptance that a patient had reached. Denial may be a way for patients to keep their eager hope for a cure alive and prevents them from accepting their medical condition.

In our study, we observed that hope can take various forms among terminally ill patients. Sometimes patients had learned to live with their disease and they only hoped for some good time in the future. These patients somehow knew that the illness would not go away. They hoped that with the right (palliative) care they would be able to have some enjoyable moments with their family and friends before they die. This idea was once expressed by the husband of Geetika (38 years), a patient with rectal cancer. When she was readmitted to the ward because her pain and drowsiness had returned, the husband said, "Good days go. Bad days go. Nothing is permanent. … Good days will come also for the treatment." He realized that his wife was dying and he was distressed because of her pain and suffering. But, at the same time, he saw the good care that she was receiving in the palliative care unit and he expressed their shared hope that after her discharge they would have some good moments together as a family.

Yet, this is not the kind of hope that we most often saw among our patients. Invariably, until the very last day, patients kept hoping that, somehow, somewhere, a cure for their treatment would be possible. This hope was nurtured by the availability of alternative treatment options, most often in the form of Ayurvedic therapies, but also curative treatment, which is offered in private hospitals even at a stage when the patient is highly unlikely to benefit from it. Lack of comprehensible information, too, allowed the patients to hope for a cure. The distinguishing line between denial and hope for a cure was often very thin and the two also mutually reinforced each other. A patient like Shweta, who denied her illness, found it very easy to hope that a cure is possible. At the same time, an all-pervasive hope can stimulate patients to deny their illness.

With the progress of the disease, our patients sooner or later had to recognize that they had the disease and had to find ways to face this fact. The road to such acceptance was a long and difficult process. For many patients, anger, frustration and depression were an integral part of it. This was particularly the case for those patients who had put all their trust in God. On the other hand, religious beliefs also helped a few patients to give meaning to their suffering and brought them closer to acceptance.

Religious Factors

Most of the patients in our study were believing practicing Hindus. Their religious views led to diverse reactions to their illness ranging from acceptance to hope, avoidance and denial. This is a remarkable contrast with the views on obtaining *mokṣa* through dying in Varanasi that emphasize active acceptance of dying. The attitudes of the palliative care patients reveal more diverse Hindu responses to dying. This need not surprise us. The beliefs on dying in Varanasi are part of a

different Hindu religious context. Varanasi is 500 miles from New Delhi. The stories that are being told there did not figure in the views of the palliative care patients in New Delhi and no one ever expressed a desire to die in Varanasi. However, the patients and their relatives did refer to religious beliefs and ideas when they discussed illness. Most commonly, they referred to karma, and the belief that God has the power to decide about life and death.

Ramesh, a 54 year old accountant suffering from kidney cancer, said that God has determined everyone's age. No matter what people try to do, no matter what medical care they seek, they will die when they have reached that age. If God wants people to survive an illness, they will survive. Ramesh was convinced that he could have been saved if his cancer had been detected earlier. That would have been possible if he had felt pain earlier, but he had not. The reason, he explained, was that God decides about life. Exactly the same view was expressed by Abhishek, who was 60 years old and had lung cancer. He said, "Living and dying are in God's hands." Om Prakash, a retired lawyer who had cancer in the spine, called God "the biggest doctor." In his view, cure and death happen because God allows them to happen. The father of Sushila, a 29-year old elementary school teacher with incurable gallbladder cancer, said that God has the power to cure his daughter.

Many of the patients who believed that God decides about life and death hoped or were even convinced that God would use his powers to cure them. Abhishek, for instance, knew that his prognosis was not good, but eagerly hoped that God would cure him through the doctors' hands. A similar view was expressed by Abhilasha, a housewife, 37 years of age with metastasized cancer. She believed that God could cure her through the medical care she was receiving at the hospital. Bhupendra, a 23-year old male patient who earned a modest living by repairing cellphones and who had been diagnosed with rhabdomyosarcoma, a very malignant cancer, was, like his mother, convinced that God was taking care of him and would cure his disease. Jyoti, a 45-year old housewife whose cancer of the anal canal had metastasized to the brain, had not been given much information about her disease, but she felt that her condition was not good and hoped that God would rescue her.

Sometimes, relatives actively stimulated hope for a divine miracle in the patients. For instance, the sister-in-law of Puneet, who was 41 years old at the time of our study and was diagnosed with esophageal cancer, repeatedly told him that God would cure him through a miracle. However, when she was asked in absence of her brother-in-law whether she really believed that such miracle would happen, she admitted that chances were slim.

Driven by this hope for a cure, most of these patients prayed to God asking for a cure. These prayers were rooted in popular Hindu stories that tell how much God cares for his devotees and fulfills the requests of those who are faithfully devoted to him. When the hoped-for cure did not materialize, these patients felt at a loss. The spiritual disillusion caused by the feeling that God had left them when they needed him most, combined with the inability to find a satisfactory answer to questions such as "Why am I not getting better?" and "Why does God not cure me?" made patients angry at God, or caused them to wonder whether He exists at all. Ritu, a 44-year old homemaker with breast cancer, had retained her strong faith in God for

a long time. She told how she had visited many temples after her diagnosis, particularly those temples which were considered to have curative powers. She had taken advice from different sadhus or sages. One of them had read her hand and told her she would get better, but not without going through intense suffering. He told her to venerate Devī, the female form of God. Ritu had done that. She had been faithful to Śiva as well. But, always her pain returned. So, she had started to doubt her beliefs.

Another example was Abhilasha, who believed that God had the power to cure her. She became desperate at times when she felt that she was not getting better. At such a moment, she once said that the doctors and nurses were taking good care of her, but they were powerless if God did not want to cure her. She had not entirely lost faith in God, but He just did not seem to listen. "Where is He?" she pondered with desperation in her voice and tears in her eyes. She felt so lost, that she wondered whether dying would not be better. "If God does not want to cure me," she said, "He can take me up."

These examples illustrate that hope for a divine cure made the illness bearable for some patients who were able to focus on a positive outcome. That hope could be strengthened by avoidance and denial, or, reversely, avoidance and denial could reinforce hope. For other patients, however, initial hope would finally lead to depression or a spiritual crisis when the hoped for cure did not materialize. But, hardly ever, would this kind of hope lead to acceptance of the illness. At the same time, there was a religious belief that directed some patients towards acceptance. A few Hindu patients with a philosophical inclination referred to the theory of karma in an attempt to understand the reason behind their suffering. They argued that, maybe, in a previous life they had done something wrong and their current illness was a punishment for that.

Ramesh testified that he sometimes wondered why he had got this disease. He had been unable to find a fully satisfactory answer. He did not smoke or eat oily food, he said. So, this disease should not have happened. Earlier, he used to feel angry once in a while, but at this stage, he no longer had the strength to feel angry. Moreover, in his view, whatever God does is good. Ramesh was clearly not blaming anyone, human or divine, for his disease. Or, maybe, in some way, he was blaming himself. He said that the illness could be a punishment for a sin that he may have committed in a previous life. The illness could be the consequence of that sin.

From that perspective, suffering can be seen as an opportunity for human beings to redeem themselves from sin and prepare themselves for their ultimate destiny: *mokṣa.* Om Prakash indirectly referred to *mokṣa* when reflecting on the reasons for his suffering. He said that the ultimate destiny of human beings is unity with God. God sends human beings who are not yet ready for this unity to earth to purify them of remaining sin. When they have accomplished that, they are ready for unity with God. So, "why do I feel this pain?" he wondered. "Maybe I hurt someone somewhere." Om Prakash explained that he believes in karma. If he does good, he will experience good consequences. If he does bad, he will experience bad consequences. To illustrate the necessity of purification of sin through suffering, Om Prakash told the story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, an influential Hindu mystic from the nine-

teenth century who suffered from cancer at the end of his life. Om Prakash recounted that Ramakrishna's pupil Vivekananda had suggested that he would ask the goddess Kali Ma for a cure. According to Om Prakash, Ramakrishna answered that the goddess would cure him without doubt, yet his pain balance would remain. Om Prakash explained that if you have to experience 100% pain as punishment for previous sins and you experience only 60%, 40% remains, which you will have to experience in this life or in a future life.

Interestingly, when the patients spoke about their belief in karma, they did so with a certain hesitation. They tried to use karma to explain their suffering, but they were never fully sure whether that was indeed the right answer. The patients used karma as a theory to help them give meaning to their current condition and suffering. In this way, the application of the idea of karma by the patients highlights a particularity of religious beliefs among patients and their relatives in the pain and palliative care unit: the beliefs focused on the present. Explanations based on karma were used to cope with the current situation. The belief that purification of karma may lead to *mokṣa* after death was not entirely absent from the patients' discourse, as illustrated by what Om Prakash told us, but it hardly was a main concern. Likewise, when the patients and their relatives thought about God, they emphasized his power over their current lives and his capacity to bring cure. When they realized that that cure was not going to materialize, they became depressed. Thoughts about the afterlife were clearly secondary and they mainly arose when patients considered the possibility that they would not be cured or that their pain or symptoms would not be controlled satisfactorily. In that case, they wanted God to take them to heaven. It was clear that that was not the preferred option of the patients, who wanted to continue their current lives. Life after death was seen as relief from pain and suffering and preferred only if no other relief was possible; there was no conscious positive choice for the afterlife. This is very different from Varanasi, where the focus of the beliefs was very much on the afterlife, and, in particular, on *mokṣa.* In this context, God is not primarily seen as the one who brings cure from illness, but as the one who guarantees something that is considered of even higher value than cure: *mokṣa.* The different emphasis of religious beliefs – on life among the palliative care patients and their relatives, and on the afterlife and *mokṣa* in Varanasi – also explains why acceptance of death and dying is, in a way, more obvious in Varanasi. The stories in Varanasi emphasize the benefits that death will bring. Such beliefs, which were much less prominent among the palliative care patients, may facilitate acceptance of death.

What explains this fundamentally different attitude towards death and dying? First, we may want to have a look at the different social and demographic profile of those seeking *mokṣa* through dying in Varanasi versus those opting for palliative care treatment in New Delhi. The former tend to be elderly people who, not only, already have a life behind them, but have also grown up in more traditional environments. Having grown up in the Varanasi region, they may be steeped in the religious stories that emphasize *mokṣa* through dying. This does not mean that releasing life is necessarily easy for them, but the context in which they live may stimulate acceptance of death and dying. On the other hand, people who are receiving treatment at

the pain and palliative care unit can be of any age. Often they are people in the prime of their life with families to care for. The fact that they are seeking treatment in a renowned tertiary hospital in the capital, which, for many of the patients requires substantial travel, attests to their belief in the powers of Western biomedicine. Such people may, indeed, not be ready to give up life easily and focus on the afterlife. A second explanation of the different attitude towards death and dying can be found in the diversity of the Hindu religious traditions. Depending on the religious context in which particular Hindus have grown up and their own religious preferences, different Hindus may emphasize different religious concepts, ideas, and stories when they give meaning to events or experiences in life. When confronted with death, for instance, some may emphasize theories related to *mokṣa,* while others may find stories about the curative powers of God more appealing. It is not surprising that such diversity leads to different attitudes to death and dying.

This last point brings us to the question whether or not the palliative care context actually causes these devotional beliefs in the curative power of God. Palliative care is part of Western biomedicine and the introduction of Western biomedicine in India from the nineteenth century onwards has had a very profound impact and not just on life expectancy. This can be illustrated by the change that the Western biomedical model has effectuated on the ancient indigenous medical system of Ayurveda. Ayurveda gradually emerged over the course of the first half of the first millennium BCE, when its foundational texts were composed. Its underlying worldview and anthropology are related to the Hindu philosophical schools of Sāṅkhya and Vaiśeṣika, but there also have been Buddhist and Jain influences (Chopra and Doiphode 2002). Traditionally, Ayurveda has been characterized by a holistic approach, in which treatment often also includes exercise and dietary prescriptions. In such an approach, improvement in the patient's condition will not only take time and happen gradually, but will also require commitment to the treatment process by the patient. If this approach is compared to the successes of Western biomedicine in which cure can often be brought about by a single drug, it is not difficult to understand why Ayurveda has adapted. There are now strands within Ayurveda that conform to biomedical notions of pharmacology. Pharmaceutical research has led to the distillation of active ingredients out of Ayurvedic medicines. The herbal medicines that are then produced based on these ingredients can be highly profitable, if they are adequately branded and efficiently marketed. This combination of the Western biomedical model and forces of the free market has substantially altered the indigenous medical system away from the original holistic approach (Banerjee 2002, 2008).

Although the example of Ayurveda does illustrate the profound impact of Western biomedicine on Indian society, science, and culture, it would not be correct to conclude from there that Western biomedicine also causes the religious beliefs in a curing God in palliative care. These beliefs are part of devotional tendencies within Hinduism that have become dominant in the Hindu traditions from the sixth century

onwards but whose roots are much older (Gielen 2013, pp. 55–59). It is, therefore, more correct to argue that the opportunities for cure and improvement that Western biomedicine represents and that are often spectacular offer a fertile ground for religious beliefs that focus on cure. If cure is seen as a realistic possibility, this cure may be interpreted as directly or indirectly brought about by an all-powerful God. Many patients who enter palliative care have been undergoing at least some kind of biomedical treatment. They are, therefore, very much aware of the positive results that Western biomedicine can achieve, although the hopes and expectations the patients may have for themselves may not be entirely realistic.

In healthcare in India, many patients have unrealistic hopes and expectations because they have never been told the truth about their diagnosis and prognosis (Chattopadhyay and Simon 2008; Raj 2012). Likewise, many of the patients that we studied were not properly informed about their disease. This is another way in which Western biomedicine may nurture belief in a curing God at the expense of beliefs such as karma and *mokṣa* that are more likely to steer patients towards acceptance. This may sound paradoxical because Western bioethical literature often lauds the ideal of the informed patient who decides about future treatment autonomously, albeit with assistance of the physician. It is often conveniently forgotten that, for most of Western medical history, physician paternalism was the norm and only in the last few decades it has become common practice among physicians to reveal a terminal diagnosis to patients (Macklin 1999, pp. 93–94; Sisk et al. 2016). In developing countries such as India, this is not yet the case. If patients are not informed about a terminal diagnosis, they may remain convinced that cure is possible and they may also be more likely to turn towards religious beliefs that reinforce their hopes for a cure rather than beliefs that include active consideration of the possibility of death.

Conclusion

Our exploration of belief in karma and *mokṣa* at the end of life in India has revealed that these two aspects are of substantially different significance in the two studied contexts. While *mokṣa* and purification of karma was at the heart of beliefs surrounding dying in Varanasi, it was much less central in the palliative care setting. Beliefs in Varanasi emphasized the future after death through a focus on the liberating effect of dying within the city. In palliative care, the belief in a God who has the power to cure was much more prominent. Karma and *mokṣa* also figured in the religious views of the palliative care patients and their relatives, but, even then, the focus remained on the present and current suffering rather than on how death would end all suffering. Comprehending the very diverse ways in which Hindu beliefs influence attitudes towards death and dying is important, because it helps to explain how individual Hindus cope with disease and accept their illness.

References

Banerjee, M. (2002). Power, culture and medicine: Ayurvedic pharmaceuticals in the modern market. *Contributions to Indian Sociology, 36*(3), 435–467.

Banerjee, M. (2008). Ayurveda in modern India: Standardization and pharmaceuticalization. In D. Wujastyk & F. M. Smith (Eds.), *Modern and global ayurveda: Pluralism and paradigms* (pp. 201–214). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Brown, C. M. (1974). *God as mother: A feminine theology in India: An historical and theological study of the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*. Hartford: Claude Stark.

Callewaert, W., & Schilder, R. (1997). *Benares. Stad van goden, hart van India*. Leuven: Peeters.

Chattopadhyay, S., & Simon, A. (2008). East meets West: Cross-cultural perspective in end-of-life decision making from Indian and German viewpoints. *Medicine, Healthcare and Philosophy, 11*(2), 165–174.

Chopra, A., & Doiphode, V. V. (2002). Ayurvedic medicine. Core concept, therapeutic principles, and current relevance. *Medical Clinics of North America, 86*(1), 75–89, vii.

Eck, D. L. (1983). *Banaras city of light*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

Filippi, G. G. (1996). *Mṛtyu: Concept of death in Indian traditions. Transformation of the body and funeral rites*. Delhi: D.K. Print World.

Gielen, J. (2013). *God in India. Diversiteit en devotie in de Indische religies*. Tielt: LannooCampus.

Gielen, J. (2014). Why does spirituality matter in end of life care? In R. Das & S. Nayak (Eds.), *Concepts of palliative care* (pp. 72–80). Cuttack: A.K. Mishra Publishers.

Hopkins, T. J. (1992). Hindu views of death and afterlife. In H. Obayashi (Ed.), *Death and afterlife: Perspectives of world religions* (pp. 143–155). Westport: Praeger.

Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1277–1288.

International Observatory on End of Life Care. (2007). *India country report*. Retrieved from http://www.eolc-observatory.net/global_analysis/pdf/india_country_report.pdf

Justice, C. (1997). *Dying the good death. The pilgrimage to die in India's holy city*. New Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications.

Kübler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying: What the dying have to teach doctors, teachers, nurses, and their own family members*. New York: Macmillan.

Lannoy, R. (2002). *Benares: A world within a world. The microcosm of Kashi yesterday and today*. Varanasi: Indica.

Macklin, R. (1999). *Against relativism: Cultural diversity and the search for ethical universals in medicine*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McDermott, E., Selman, L., Wright, M., & Clark, D. (2008). Hospice and palliative care development in India. A multi-method review of services and experiences. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management, 35*(6), 583–593.

Parry, J. P. (1982). Sacrificial death and the necrophagous ascetic. In M. Bloch & J. P. Parry (Eds.), *Death and the regeneration of life* (pp. 74–110). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Parry, J. P. (1993a). Death and cosmogony in Kashi. In R. P. B. Singh (Ed.), *Banāras (Vārāṇasī): Cosmic order, sacred city, Hindu traditions: Festschrift to Prof. R.L. Singh* (pp. 103–121). Varanasi: Tara Book Agency.

Parry, J. P. (1993b). Ghosts, greed and sin: The occupational identity of the Banaras funeral priests. In R. P. B. Singh (Ed.), *Banāras (Vārāṇasī): Cosmic order, sacred city, Hindu traditions: Festschrift to Prof. R.L. Singh* (pp. 179–196). Varanasi: Tara Book Agency.

Parry, J. P. (1994). *Death in Banaras*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Raj, E. H. (2012). The changing scenario in oncologist-patient communication: We need to adapt … The Cherny article reviewed. *Oncology, 26*(1), 48–55.

Rajagopal, M. R., & Palat, G. (2002). Kerala, India. Status of cancer pain relief and palliative care. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management, 24*(2), 191–193.

Seamark, D., Ajithakumari, K., Burn, G., Saraswalthi Devi, P., Koshy, R., & Seamark, C. (2000). Palliative care in India. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, 93*(6), 292–295.
Shanmugasundaram, S., Chapman, Y., & O'Connor, M. (2006). Development of palliative care in India. An overview. *International Journal of Nursing Practice, 12*(4), 241–246.
Sisk, B., Frankel, R., Kodish, E., & Harry Isaacson, J. (2016). The truth about truth-telling in American medicine: A brief history. *The Permanente Journal, 20*(3), 74–77.

Death and the Afterlife in Japan

Gordon Mathews

Abstract This chapter explores how Japanese attitudes towards death today both mirror the contemporary developed world as a whole, in the sense of death as a taboo to be hidden in hospitals, and also have their own very particular qualities, in the devotion to the departed dead apart from any belief in a monotheistic god. The chapter examines ancestor worship, beliefs in reincarnation, senses of the brevity of human life and suicide, and skepticism about any world beyond this one, as attitudes toward death in Japanese history that have extended into the present. It also looks at the growing individualization of death in Japan today, as death becomes not a matter of household ancestral worship but individual preference of funerals and also of senses of life after death, perhaps into an increasingly secular future.

Keywords Japan · Life after death · Ancestor worship · The household · Reincarnation · Funerals · Individuation

Death and the Afterlife in Japan

Death in Japan and the Contemporary World

Japan, with one of the longest life expectancies in the world, is like other developed countries in the sense that death is no longer a fully recognizable part of life. Centuries past, when many children died in infancy and when living to an old age was an exception rather than a rule, most people died at home, in the midst of life. Death in such a situation was, throughout the world, an intimate part of life. Today, this is no longer the case in the developed world, where the large majority of people die in hospitals. Most of us in the developed world never directly face death, except perhaps through the well-preserved corpses we may see at funerals. Death is distant, something we see primarily on television or in movies. This is true in Japan as much

G. Mathews (✉)
The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, Hong Kong
e-mail: cmgordon@cuhk.edu.hk

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_3

as anywhere else in the developed world (although not necessarily in the developing world)—death is kept at a medicalized remove, so that the living almost never encounter it except in mass media representations. Long's (2005) perceptive discussion of terminally-ill patients in Japan living out their final days in hospitals, and Suzuki's (2002) equally perceptive discussion of the funeral industry in Japan, discuss Japan's particular cultural differences as compared to other societies, but most fundamentally these books show that Japan is in the modern world of death. Japanese patients are struggling to maintain personal dignity in their death in a hospital system that is highly technologized and bureaucratized. For their bereaved after death, they are attempting to present a uniquely individual loss in a funeral system that until recently has offered few options in its commercialization. Their agonies are not fundamentally different from those in other contemporary industrialized societies. Western mass media still occasionally portray Japan as an exotic "other"—a society of samurai stoically committing suicide, and of Zen monks meditating towards Buddhist enlightenment. While these portrayals bear a small grain of historical truth, they have almost nothing to do with how almost all Japanese live and die today.

Still, Japan is different from Western societies in its attitude towards death. In this chapter, based in part on extensive interviews I have conducted with some one hundred forty Japanese over the past 30 years about their ideas of death and life after death, and also on a range of contemporary Japanese books exploring death as well as various Western scholarly volumes, I examine how Japan both resembles and differs from other societies in the developed world as to its past and contemporary practices and attitudes towards death and what lies beyond.

There is one essential difference between Japan and many Western societies. Many Japanese households have Buddhist altars in their home, often large pieces of furniture, cabinets opening onto photographs of the dead, and ancestor tablets, where the dead are prayed to (see Smith 1974; Reader 1991; Lewis 2017). In a Western, Christian context, one may have a picture of one's late mother or father or spouse, but they are not the object of worship. In Japan, for many people, they are, although what is ancestor worship and what is ancestor appreciation typically remains an open question. In many Japanese families at present, offerings of rice or water or snacks or *sake* are left for the departed person every day. That person may also be conversed with, with the living describing what has happened within the family to the departed, and prayed to; the recently dead still belong to the living in this sense. Most Japanese visit the family grave in the August festival of *Obon*, when the dead are said to return to the realm of the living, and there too are communed with by the living (Reader 1991, pp. 98–101). Decades ago, the anthropologist David Plath wrote an article about Japan entitled, "Where the Family of God is the Family" (1964). This title accurately summarizes a critical difference between Japan and many Western countries. In a society such as the United States, many people think of the dead as ascending to the heaven of a Judeo-Christian God. Very few Japanese believe such a thing. For many Japanese, the deceased person becomes an ancestor, to be worshipped at the family altar and grave, just as the deceased worshipped the family ancestors while he or she was still living.

Today, slightly less than half of Japanese households have Buddhist altars (Kotani 2017, p. 33), but this is not so much because of secularization (although see Reader 2012) as because of long life expectancy (Kotani 2017, pp. 33–35). Generally, the eldest son inherits the family altar, which is typically tended to by the oldest woman in the household; but in an era of long life expectancy, with many people living into their eighties and nineties, younger families may have no Buddhist altar for decades, and may pay their respects to ancestors and departed loved ones at their parents' houses. In addition, many families, in an era of smaller families, do not have sons, and so the fate of the family Buddhist altar may be unclear. Nonetheless, most Japanese today do indeed revere the ancestors at a family altar in their own or a parental household. Most Japanese today visit the ancestors at the family grave one or more times a year, most typically at *Obon*.

Buddhism and Shinto are Japan's two dominant religions, with Shinto often thought of in terms of birth—although Japanese war dead are honored as gods in Shinto shrines—and Buddhism thought of in terms of death. Buddhism today is described by many Japanese as simply "a religion of funerals," or, more cynically, as "the funeral business," since the large majority of funerals in Japan are Buddhist, requiring the service of one or more Buddhist priests. Rather than emphasize faith, as in Christianity—what you believe—the emphasis in Japan is more on practice or what you do (Reader 1991, pp. 1–22). Many of the people who give greetings at the Buddhist altar to their departed ancestors and visit their graves every summer do not really think that their departed ancestors can actually hear them; some people believe this, but many more do not. Yet they do indeed diligently give their greetings at the altar and visit the family grave. Practice is the key to understanding Japanese attitudes towards death and what may come thereafter—what you think is less important than what you do in Japanese observations towards the dead.

A comic strip dating from 1965 amusingly reveals this. A Buddhist priest is shown intoning sutras at a family's Buddhist altar, having been engaged by the family for this purpose, and then, as is sometimes the custom in Japan, he eats a meal and drinks *sake* with the family. After drinking quite a bit, he then says to the family, "Heaven, hell? Who knows about such things until you're dead?" The family that has engaged him exclaims, "When you're drunk, what you say gets really interesting!" (Hasegawa 1995, p. 139). It is difficult to imagine American Christian ministers of most denominations proclaiming skepticism about heaven in a dinner with their parishioners and then being warmly appreciated. But in Japan, the priest's duty is to chant sutras and engage in the appropriate rituals at certain points after death, not to proclaim faith in any world beyond death. In most Japanese religious contexts, that is beside the point.

I have in this introductory section provided a brief depiction of death in Japan in its similarities and differences from other developed-world societies. In the next section, I discuss a number of themes from Japan's past practices and attitudes towards death that still resonate today.

Japanese Death Past into the Present

Ancestor Worship

The first, and most essential historical theme is the idea of ancestors and their worship. As Robert J. Smith has written,

> Since at least the seventh century, some elements of the population have conducted ceremonies designed specifically to benefit the souls of the dead, to seek their benign protection and assistance, to secure their intercession on their behalf of one or another of the compassionate Buddhas, or to share with them the pleasures and sorrows of the living. (1974, p. 211)

Buddhism arrived in Japan in the sixth century, and soon became intimately linked to ancestor worship. "By around the mid-ninth century, Japanese elites were not only performing and commissioning Buddhist rites for the welfare of the deceased but had also begun to envision their own postmortem fate in Buddhist terms" (Stone and Walter 2008, p. 6). "For the most part, Japanese Buddhism *is* ancestor worship," notes Smith (1974, p. viii). The basic purpose of ancestor worship has been to enable the appreciation of all that the ancestors have done in shaping and making possible one's household of the present. It has also been to ensure the passage of the newly dead from the world of the living to the world beyond. The idea is to transform the dead from presences who, in the popular view over Japanese history, might remain in this human world as spirits or ghosts to torment the living if they are not properly sent off to become Buddhas (*hotoke*) and eventually Shinto gods (*kami*) safely enshrined in the other world. The first 49 days are the most perilous, with the dead, in Japanese mythology, crossing the Sanzu River on the journey to the afterlife, being greeted by their ancestors and eventually fully entering the realm of the dead. They are remembered as individuals in ancestor worship up until the 33rd or at most, the 50th yearly anniversary of their deaths, after which they join the generalized realm of ancestors in their particular household. These different concepts have evolved throughout Japanese history in various ways, but today, as in the case of the Sanzu River, are typically not believed by most Japanese. They do indeed occasionally crop up in conversations about life after death (as I have heard in one of my interviews, "My father was calling to me from across the Sanzu River that it wasn't yet time to cross, and so I'm still here in this world") and still feature in Japanese books purporting to provide guidance to their readers about the world after death (Satō 2016, pp. 40–41).

Ancestor worship has not, until recently, been primarily a matter of individuals worshiping those who have died, but rather the household (*ie*) worshiping its ancestors. The household, referring to the house and its property and to the patrilineal family line, typically of parents while alive, their eldest son, his married-in wife, and their children, has been the unit of worship. The linkage of ancestor worship to the household was solidified by the Japanese state in history. In the early Tokugawa period, in the 16th and 17th centuries, in an era in which the Japanese government was intensely concerned about the spread of Christianity in Japan, all Japanese

households were required to register with a Buddhist temple, to prove that no one in the household was a Christian. This legal requirement has long been rescinded, but belonging to a Buddhist temple by most Japanese households has remained until today. Even if a family has no interest in Buddhism, it is still likely to call upon a Buddhist temple to be engaged in a funeral, along with a commercial funeral company. Reader, at the start of his primer on Japanese religion, relates how, when, he asked his Japanese professor friends, "Which Buddhist sect do you belong to?", the answer he received was, "I don't know, no one in our household has died yet" (1991, p. 3). Only with the death of a family member would these friends call upon religious specialists—Buddhist priests—to properly conduct the chanting of sutras necessary for the funeral, and thereby learn what Buddhist sect their families happen to belong to.

The state also intervened in familial ancestor worship at a later period. The Meiji government in the late nineteenth century spent decades attempting to shift Japanese people's beliefs from the Shinto gods protecting their villages to a new sense of the nation: a national god. In 1890, the Imperial Rescript on Education was issued, a pledge requiring recitation by schoolchildren. This document linked filial piety—loyalty and respect to one's own father and one's ancestors—to loyalty to the Japanese emperor (Smith 1974, p. 27; Smith 1983, pp. 31–32). This was remarkably effective—in the late nineteenth century, only a small minority of Japanese had much consciousness of Japan as a country, but within 50 years, many young Japanese were apparently willing to die for their country in World War II—reflecting the ability of state-sponsored initiatives to shape ancestor worship and thus create a willingness to die for the emperor and country among many members of the Japanese population.

This state-sanctioned approach to ancestor worship ended after World War II, when the household lost its legal status. Today, Japan, like most other developed-world societies, allows for complete freedom as to if and how ancestor worship is to be practiced, and there is marked individual variation—indeed, ancestor worship, like attitudes towards death in general, has become individualized, due largely to the fact that Japan has become urbanized, and the household, based in rural Japanese life, has become marginalized. Today, as later discussed, ancestor worship, over the current and coming generations, is becoming wholly different in form from what it has been throughout much of Japanese history.

Reincarnation

A second theme of Japanese death is reincarnation. There has always been a considerable degree of variation in Japanese senses of what lies beyond the grave (Formanek and LaFleur 2004), with some believing in reincarnation, the transmigration of humans into different levels of existence (LaFleur 1986), and others believing in the promise of Buddhist paradise attainable upon death (although Amstutz 2004 emphasizes wide variation even within this view), and still others in

a realm of ancestors. One reason for such variation is that because, as earlier noted, Japanese religion has been based more on practice than on creed: individuals have been to some extent left free to imagine what they will.

Belief in reincarnation waxed and waned during different eras of Japanese history. In medieval Japan, during the Kamakura shogunate (1185–1333), the dominant belief was indeed that of reincarnation, that human beings would be reincarnated into one of six levels, known in Japanese as *rokudō*: humans might become gods, humans, warlike titans, animals, hungry ghosts, or creatures of hell, in accordance with the workings of karma, the principle whereby one's deeds in previous lives shape one's existence in this life. *Rokudō* became the "basic map of reality" of the age, accepted as common sense by virtually everyone, akin to the role science plays in our world today (LaFleur 1986, p. 27). In an era such as the Kamukura Period, beset by wars and struggle, the appeal of *rokudō* is apparent. Ancestor worship may reward both the unjust and the just—any ancestor may be worshiped—but *rokudō* and other forms of reincarnation promise to reward those who have lived properly in this life and punish those who have not, by giving the deceased different destinations depending upon how they have lived in this life.

Belief in reincarnation in most eras of Japanese history has apparently been a minority belief as compared to ancestor worship. This is particularly because Pure Land Buddhism, founded by the renowned Buddhist sages Hōnen and Shinran, also during the Kamakura Period, posited that an expression of faith in the blessings of the Buddha could bring one directly to paradise after death, with no need for multiple lives. In an era of suffering, Shinran held, no one could transcend the cycle of births and death through their own power, but only through the infinite mercy of the Amida Buddha (Amstutz 2004, p. 160; Stone and Walter 2008); this form of Buddhism remains one of the most widely followed forms of Buddhism in Japan today. Nonetheless, *rokudō* has also continued throughout Japanese history, and appears even today in Japanese books on life after death (Satō 2016, pp. 18–19). But there is a logical contradiction in *rokudō*: are the dead reincarnated into a different existence, or do they stay close in order to protect us, as ancestor worship implies? When you pray to your departed loved ones at the family altar, can they hear you? At the family grave at *Obon*, are the departed coming back from the dead to commune with you, or have they been reincarnated into a different being, in which case they presumably couldn't possibly come back?

Some Japanese writers (for example, Shimada 2016, pp. 23, 26–27) solve this logical problem by saying that reincarnation is delayed until after the 33rd or 50th anniversary of the death of a person, after which Buddhist ceremonies conducted for a specific individual cease, and the individual becomes a more generalized ancestor—then reincarnation takes place. But there is a larger issue here: cognitively, where people actually go after they die has never really been very clear. As Reader maintains, "Although conceptualizations of other worlds have long existed in Japan, particularly in Buddhism…the Japanese have not, by and large, dwelt much on speculations about what lies beyond" (1991, pp. 42–43). Instead, what is essential is the ongoing relation between the dead and the living. Whether the dead are reincarnated or remain in or near the household to help the living is unclear, but perhaps

surprisingly to some Western readers, it doesn't seem to matter much to most Japanese.

I saw this de-emphasis on logic in some of my interviews, most notably when a Buddhist nun I spoke with in 1990 said first that she would be united with Buddha after her death, and then that she would be reborn as a temple cat. When I asked her how she could think that both of these would be the case, she looked at me with a somewhat peeved expression and asked, "Why are you thinking this way?" I was searching for a logical consistency in her answers that she felt was unimportant, as her question revealed to me. Many Japanese would agree. Belief is less important than practice, and logical consistency of belief is less important than emotional feeling. How reincarnation may interact with ancestor worship is something that no Japanese I have ever met spends much time wrestling with. Today, numbers of Japanese have returned to belief in reincarnation as linked to adherence to New Age philosophy, whereby reincarnation is seen as a matter of the ongoing growth of oneself lifetime after lifetime. This is in conjunction with the increasing individualization of Japan, as familial and household links seem less and less important to many in terms of how one should live and die, as I will later discuss.

"The brevity of human life"/Suicide

A third theme concerning Japanese death is encompassed in the Japanese phrase *ningen no hakanasa*, "the brevity of human life." Japanese aesthetics have long adhered to the idea that the essence of beauty in all its poignancy lies in vanishing—the fragile wonder of cherry blossoms to most Japanese lies in the fact that the blossoms last for only a short time, and then scatter in the wind; it is the fact that they scatter that makes them so beautiful. This idea, when applied to human life, may make death philosophically more bearable. And yet, as human beings, we nonetheless cannot help but grieve at the losses death brings us. The poet Kobayashi Issa, shortly after his little daughter had died, wrote the extraordinary haiku, *tsuyu no yo wa, tsuyu no yo nagara, sarinagara*, which I translate, liberally, as, "Yes, this world is but a world of dew. And yet…" Issa wrote that haiku in response to his friends who had come to commiserate with him, speaking, perhaps, of *ningen no hakanasa*. His reply: "Yes, I know that all things fade away, including human life. I know that. And still…" Despite all knowledge of life's brevity, the searing pain of loss and grief remains. Buddhism's First Noble Truth is that all life is suffering, and no aesthetic insight can ever fully mitigate that, as Issa's *haiku* so briefly and powerfully expresses.

The idea of life's brevity is linked to suicide in Japanese traditional aesthetics, in the sense that since life is brief and fleeting, it may be honorably ended when one's social place has become untenable. This is apparent in a number of famous works in Japanese literature, such as the love suicides described in Chikamatsu's play *The Love Suicides at Sonezaki* (see Keene 1968, pp. 375–393), depicting lovers whose love is thwarted through treachery and find no other way out than suicide, and also

in the masterless samurai described as "The Forty Seven Rōnin," who murdered the court official who had insulted their master, and then all committed *seppuk*u, ritual suicide (see Benedict 1974 [1946], pp. 199–205). These suicides have been widely celebrated in Japanese history, as have too, the more recent suicides of *kamikaze* pilots flying their planes into foreign battleships in World War II, valiantly sacrificing themselves against hopeless odds (see Ohnuki-Tierney 2002, 2007).

Certainly suicide has indeed been more celebrated among heroes of the Japanese past and in Japanese literature than in Western societies. It is also true that there are cultural reasons for suicide. Ruth Benedict (1974 [1946], pp. 38–42) analyzed why Japanese soldiers in World War II were likely to fight to the last man rather than surrendering; in her analysis, departing from one's group through surrender was already a fate worse than death. But for most Japanese throughout history, poor peasants rather than samurai, suicide often took on a very different meaning. *Obasuteyama* is an oft-told folktale depicted in a popular 1980s film, "The Ballad of Narayama," as discussed by Danely (2014, p. 67): the film portrays an elderly but still vital woman living in a rural village who seeks, in accordance with tradition, to be cast aside on a mountain to die, simply because there is not enough food to go around to feed the young in her family. Suicide today in Japan is generally seen as a terrible, pathetic happenstance—the salarymen who, in despair from intense work pressure, throw themselves onto the train tracks in busy commuter stations (Kurotani 2013), the young people who band together to kill themselves because life seems pointless and they are too afraid to die alone (Ozawa-de Silva 2008), or the elderly leading lives some may see as unbearably lonely (Danely 2014). Today, there is little glory to be found in suicide in Japan.

Skepticism towards Creeds and Faiths

A fourth theme in Japanese death and its interpretation has already been alluded to: the general attitude of skepticism towards creeds and faiths. This has existed throughout Japanese history to a degree, although waxing and waning in different eras, and is partly a matter of emotional linkages with the dead triumphing over any abstract creeds. It is also a matter of the sheer proliferation of beliefs concerning death and the hereafter, as is apparent in the edited collection *Practicing the Afterlife: Perspectives from Japan* (Formanek and LaFleur 2004), portraying a remarkably wide range of depictions of afterlives over Japanese history.

One reason for such variation is that because Japanese religion has been based more on practice than on creed, as earlier noted, individuals have been to a considerable extent left free to imagine what they will about worlds beyond this one. Another reason is the emergence of considerable skepticism in Japan in recent years concerning what lies beyond the grave. This is a product of the modern age, reflecting the attitude of skepticism towards religion and beliefs in the afterlife that emerged in Europe and the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see

Baumer 1960; Turner 1985); a similar skepticism arose in Japan after the Meiji Restoration. Fukuzawa Yukichi, to take just one example, reported in his autobiography how he secretly replaced the sacred objects in Shinto shrines with stones to see what might befall him; when nothing happened, he ceased to place credence in Shinto (Fukuzawa [1899] 1966, p. 17). Japanese skepticism has continued and apparently grown up until the present. Certainly there are millions of Japanese—especially among older generations—who continue to bear full faith in a world beyond; as one woman in her eighties told me, "I pray to the ancestors, and when something bad is happening, always someone has come to help me. After I die, I'll protect this family. I'll come and help my family here, just as my ancestors have come to help me" (Mathews 2011: 370). There are millions more who adhere to a range of what are known in Japan as New Religions, Sōka Gakkai among many others, who adhere firmly to their faith's postulated afterlife (see, for example, Mathews 1996, pp. 168–172).

However, gentle skepticism is the default mode today, as is apparent in countless examples from mass media over the decades. As Kishida and Kotaki write (2005, p. 154) "People don't believe in Pure Land [the celestial realm of paradise] any more even if they say they do….Even the priests don't talk about it." In the many books I have read concerning Japanese conceptions of life after death, the dominant attitude is, "no one knows what happens after we die, so if it makes you happier to believe that there is a world after you die, then please go ahead and believe." The number of believers in *ano yo*, a world after death, has apparently gone up in Japan in recent years. According to one set of surveys, 40% of Japanese believed in "ano yo" in 2013, up from just 20% in 1958, perhaps because "once Japan became richer, people are looking for more than just the material" (Saito 2015, pp.153–154). I suspect that many of these positive respondents are not "believers" so much as "hopers"—"I really want to meet my mother again after I die, so yes, I think that maybe I will…" In Japan at present, broad skepticism exists side by side with hope, as I now discuss in the final section of this chapter.

Japanese Death into the Future

As noted earlier, Japanese attitudes and practices towards death have been very much shaped by the family system. The ancestors have been attached to a family through the patriarchal line, with the eldest son inheriting the household (*ie*) and the Buddhist altar of his family; his wife, or in a three-generational household, perhaps his mother, would look after the Buddhist altar, probably worshiping at it every day, lighting incense, and providing offerings. The fact that the wife would not belong to this household until after her marriage—the fact that the departed grandparents she would pray for as her familial duty would not be her own but her husband's—was built into this system, and accepted by most women as a matter of course. What Wolf has described as "the uterine family" in Taiwan (1972), of women becoming assimilated into their husbands' patrilineal families after leaving their own to marry,

and over the decades and with the birth and growth of children, establishing their own powerful place within the family, definitely has its parallels in Japanese familial structures traditionally and recently as well.

But things are changing in Japan. According to one recent survey, some 20 percent of Japanese women have little desire to share a familial grave with their husbands, but would rather make their own individual arrangements (Kotani 2017, p. 107). Partly—as some of my own interviewees over the years have described—this is because they resent their husbands' behavior in their married lives, and do not want to spend an eternity next to those husbands. Virtually all deaths in Japan today are dealt with through cremation—an urn containing their ashes would be placed in a niche in the back of the grave, next to their husbands' urn—but this was unacceptable to these women.

Aside from these women's personal attitudes towards their husbands, there is the fact that the household system is dying out. The major reason for this is that Japan has become urbanized in the post-World-War II era, with most families living not in large rural three-generation households with many children, but rather in conjugal families living in small apartments that have no room for large Buddhist altars, far from the ancestral family's rural temple. It is also giving way because families have fewer and fewer children, and many families have no eldest son to carry on the family line and inherit the Buddhist altar. Throughout the developed world, adherence to religion has more or less declined. But in Japan, this has taken place primarily for demographic reasons—as Japan increasingly becomes a society based on conjugal families, having someone to inherit the Buddhist altar becomes increasingly problematic. Many older Japanese are resigned to the fact that the tradition of caring for the family Buddhist altar will end with their generation. They may say (as elders have told me), "I don't have a son to carry on the family line, so I guess it will die out," or "My son is single and lives in an apartment in Tokyo, and I just don't think he's interested in inheriting the family altar. I don't want to cause him trouble, so I won't insist."

This does not mean that ancestor worship is dying out, however. Instead, it is becoming profoundly individuated. The household, for increasing numbers of Japanese, is no longer the central unit of ancestor worship; rather it is the individual, particularly the individual who has lost a loved one and prays to his or her memory and perhaps communicates with her or him on a regular basis as well. Ancestor worship has gone from worship of the familial ancestors to worship of particular people who have died and are greatly missed. As a recently widowed woman in her fifties told me, "I want to believe that there is another world beyond this one, where I can meet my [late] husband. If there was only nothingness, it would be awfully sad. I want to believe this, and that's what I think when I talk to my husband at the *butsudan* [Buddhist altar]. I want to believe it and so I do believe it. I will meet him, I'm sure." This is a new face of ancestor worship in Japan, unrelated to the family line. Smith predicted this transformation more than 40 years ago (1974), and Morioka thereafter (1984), but now it is coming true, not for everyone, but for a very significant number of urban Japanese seeking solace and communion with those they have

lost, as a number of commentators have recently discussed, writing in Japanese (Shimada 2016) or in English (I. Suzuki 2013a, b).

An ongoing cultural nightmare today for many Japanese is *kodokushi*, or "dying a lonely death." Japanese newspapers often contain accounts of an old person's corpse being found only weeks or months after death, after the stench becomes so overpowering that the neighbors, who may never even have known the deceased, cannot help but take notice. This is one more illustration of Japan's profoundly changing demographics. Certainly in the past there were old people who died alone—the cultural nightmare in an earlier era of the household and its Buddhist altar was of dying as *muenbotoke*, a person without linkages to a household (Smith 1974, p. 41), and who thus cannot enter the world of the dead. Today, with the emergence of alternative funeral arrangements, as I discuss below, this is less of a worry for many. Instead, the new cultural nightmare is one of dying lonely, with no one who cares about you, indeed, with no one even noticing. Japanese TV dramas on occasion show a lone elderly person dying a neglected, unnoticed death, sometimes surrounded by empty *sake* bottles, drunk to diminish dying's pain. As one recent Japanese book emphasizes (Shimada 2016, pp. 122–124), all death is ultimately alone, so concern over *kodokushi* is futile; but the acute cultural concern of the present era remains.

In light of all this, a number of new arrangements are emerging, in attitudes towards death and dying, and in Japanese funerals as well. In the early 2000s, Suzuki wrote of "McFunerals," comparing Japanese funerals to McDonalds in their commercial uniformity (2003). But over the past decade, an array of new funeral services have emerged, including private family funerals, ash-scattering (Kawano 2010), and tree burials (Boret 2014) among other forms of death ceremonies—funerals have become individualized and privatized (Inoue 2013), leaving behind, for more and more Japanese, the household.

Underlying this are changing cultural attitudes towards death. As one Japanese authority argues (Hinohara 2003, pp. 201, 221), "Death is the final chance you have to show what you really are….Death is the last chance you have for self-realization. One way of looking at death is as one's final assessment of one's life—as one of my interviewees stated to me, "When I die, I want to be able to examine my life and know that I lived in the best possible way. Nothing happens after that—I'm only dead—but I live now for that"—or even one's final performance, as is the case for carefully scripted funerals celebrating one's own individual life, as have increasingly been held. But there is also the idea, held by some half of Japanese according to the World Values Survey (Inglehart et al. 2004, pp. F051) (a percentage somewhat higher than that earlier mentioned) that there is indeed life after death. What this life after death actually consists of is wildly variant, just as it has been widely variant throughout Japanese history, but perhaps even more so today. As one Japanese book puts it, "As for…"life after death", if you have a hundred people you'll have a hundred different interpretations" (Inoue 2007, p. 74). "Japanese today…seek their own 'life after death,'" writes Nakasuji (2006, pp. 204, 206), focusing in her analysis on how, with the *ie* and its attendant ancestor worship diminishing in importance, there has been a growing individualization not just of funerals, but also of senses of the

afterlife. Ancestor worship remains, of course, along with belief in reincarnation and heaven and hell, but also today envisionings of multitudes of other posthumous fates including multiple dimensions and multiple universes.

In my interviews on death and life after death in Japan, a large number of people I interviewed indicated that they were afraid of death. This reflects not simply Japan but the entire contemporary developed world ((although less so in the developing world, where religious belief remains strong in many areas): whereas several hundred years ago, most people believed that their lives would continue beyond the grave in some form, today many people in Japan and across the developed world do not think so. As one Japanese book eloquently states our situation (Kishida and Kotaki 2005, pp. 99–100):

> In the 20th century…we are only left with an ideology of reason….It can to some extent address problems in this world, but it can't answer the question of what we were before we were born or what happens after we die….Take a three-year-old child who died of cancer. Science can only say that your child, by chance, died. But the parents need more than that: another world, or reincarnation to believe in: "she received something awful from an earlier life, so she had to suffer in this life; by dying, she solved this problem, and will be reborn in a better place." This kind of fiction is necessary and was taken care of by religion in the past….But rationality has destroyed the other world [*ano yo*].

But while institutionalized religions such as Buddhism may be gradually fading as to their influence, senses of *ano yo*, "the other world," the term most commonly used in Japanese to refer to life after death, have apparently been burgeoning. There has been a boom in Japan in recent years in books discussing or depicting life after death from a broad range of perspectives, many of which seem explicitly devoted to providing the comfort of belief in a world beyond the grave. One bestselling author in this boom has been Iida Fumihiko, whose books, including works such as *Hito wa shinde mo ikite iru* ("Those who die live on") (2005) have sold some two million copies in all. Iida offers a New-Age-like vision whereby each of us proceeds from reincarnation to reincarnation, choosing our future lives and their misfortunes in order to grow more fully. Death is thus not real, but is merely a stage of growth, which is our human purpose, growth into wisdom. The ultimate purpose of this growth is never made clear in this book and others; simply, death is not real, and we pass through life after life, death after death to reach ultimate self-realization. Another Japanese author (Imaizumi 2006, p. 59) tartly comments that Iida's depiction of life after death is a bit unlikely, since we may be reborn as animals, as insects, "but if you want to make it your life's meaning, go ahead."

Japanese senses of life after death are notably different from those in a Western context in that they are not based on belief or its lack—the arguments so prominent in the United States over whether or not God and heaven are real (see, for example, Alexander 2012; Dawkins 2008). Rather, they are based on hope. For example, in my own interviews on life after death, a widowed woman in her sixties said, "When I die, I'll meet my husband. I'm sure…. Maybe there really is nothing after you die. Still, I'll meet my husband, and my friends: that's not a religious conviction, but just my feeling" (Mathews 2011: 370). A woman in her fifties said, "After my mother died, I stopped being afraid of death; I begin to feel that maybe I could see her again

when I died. Maybe, though, I might simply disappear when I die….No, there's life after death. I feel my mother is close to me; I can see her again in the other world…" A retired corporate worker in his sixties said, "When I have a problem and don't know what to do, I visit my father's grave and ask him for help. I really do think that my prayer reaches him. Still, I don't know that there's life after death: nobody knows for sure about these things" (Mathews 2011: 371). Unlike adherents to monotheistic religions, in Japan, Buddhist priests and laypeople alike typically claim no particular knowledge. Imaizumi mentions (2006, p. 55) a well-known Buddhist nun, Setouchi Jakuchō, who, when asked "Is there another world?" answers, "Sorry, but because I haven't died yet, I don't know."

All in all, senses of life after death in Japan seem remarkably individualistic and undogmatic when compared to the argumentative nature of so many discussions in the United States and other Western countries. There is comparatively little religious certainty, but rather a sense that, "believe whatever you can believe in," both in Japanese books and in the individuals I interviewed. The decline of ancestor worship has led to a flourishing not just of individual choices in funerals but also in individual choices in senses of life after death. I began this chapter by discussing how Japan, in its treatment of death, is in many ways parallel to societies throughout the developed world, and this may be true not simply in its efforts to keep death hidden, but also in its movement away from any belief in life after death. This reflects the contemporary world. Zuckermann (2016) as well as Walter (1996) write of those among us who are secular, who no longer need religion and its promise of meaning beyond this life; Harari (2015, pp. 24–33) writes of how, while earlier, the major religions of the world provided meaning in life, a transition to the next world, today, these religions have lost their meanings for many, and death has become no more than a technical problem to be overcome, as human beings push towards medical immortality. Japan is one more society undergoing this transition, in its own culturally specific way. Japanese life today continues to be in many ways quite constraining, such as in attitudes towards gender roles, and in the individual's highly restrained place within institutions. But Japanese senses of life after death today are remarkably liberating in their tolerance and hopefulness. In this respect, Japan may have a significant lesson to offer the world.

References

Alexander, E. (2012). *Proof of heaven: A Neurosurgeon's journey into the afterlife*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Amstutz, G. (2004). Steadied ambiguity: The afterlife in 'Popular' shin Buddhism. In S. Formanek & W. R. LaFleur (Eds.), *Practicing the afterlife: Perspectives from Japan* (pp. 157–177). Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Baumer, F. L. (1960). *Religion and the rise of skepticism*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Benedict, R. (1974[1946]). *The Chrysanthemum and the sword: Patters of Japanese culture*. New York: New American Library.

Boret, S. P. (2014). *Japanese tree burial: Ecology, kinship, and the culture of death*. London: Routledge.
Danely, J. (2014). *Aging and loss: Mourning and maturity in contemporary Japan*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
Dawkins, R. (2008). *The god delusion*. New York: Mariner Books.
Formanek, S., & LaFleur, W. R. (Eds.). (2004). *Practicing the afterlife: Perspectives from Japan*. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences.
Fukuzawa, Y. (1899[1966]). *The Autobiography of Fukuzawa Yukichi* (E. Kiyooka, Trans.). Columbia University Press.
Harari, Y. N. (2015). *Homo Deus: A brief history of tomorrow*. London: Vintage.
Hasegawa, M. (1995). *Sazae-san* (Vol. 30). Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha.
Hinohara, S. (2003). *Inochi to ikigai* [Life and what makes life worth living], Seishun Shuppansha.
Iida, F. (2005). *Hito wa shinde mo ikite iru* [People who die live on]. Kyōto: PHP Kenkyūjo.
Imaizumi, M. (2006). *Shi o kowagarazu, sei o yokubarazu* [Not fearing death, not being greedy for life]. Tokyo: Nisshin Hōdō.
Inglehart, R., Basáñez, M., Diex-Medrano, J., Halman, L., & Luijkx, R. (Eds.). (2004). *Human beliefs and values: A cross-cultural sourcebook based on the 1999–2002 values surveys,* Mexico City: Siglo XXI, electronic reproduction, Boulder CO: Net Library.
Inoue, K. (2007). *Shinikata sagashi, ikikata sagashi* [Looking for a way of death, looking for a way of life]. Tokyo: Daini Kaientai.
Inoue, H. (2013). Contemporary transformations of Japanese death ceremonies. In H. Susuki (Ed.), *Death and dying in contemporary Japan* (pp. 123–137). London: Routledge.
Kawano, S. (2010). *Nature's embrace: Japan's aging urbanites and new death rites*. Honolulu: University of Hawa'ii Press.
Keene, D. (1968). *Anthology of Japanese literature to the nineteenth century*. New York: Penguin Books.
Kishida, S., & Kotaki, T. (2005). *Ikiru gensō, shinu gensō* (the llusion of living, the illusion of dying). Tokyo: Shinjusha.
Kotani, M. (2017). *'Hitori shi' jidai to osōshiki to ohaka* [Grave and funerals in an era of "dying alone"]. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.
Kurotani, S. (2013). *Sarariiman* suicides in Heisei Japan. In H. Suzuki (Ed.), *Death and dying in contemporary Japan* (pp. 64–80). London: Routledge.
LaFleur, W. R. (1986). *The Karma of words: Buddhism and the literary arts in Medieval Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Lewis, D. C. (2017). *Religion in Japanese daily life*. London: Routledge.
Long, S. O. (2005). *Final days: Japanese culture and choice at the end of life*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
Mathews, G. (1996). *What makes life worth living? How Japanese and Americans make sense of their worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Mathews, G. (2011). Understanding Japanese society through life after death. *Japan Forum, 23*(3), 363–383.
Morioka, K. (1984) *Ie no henbo to senzo no matsuri* [Ancestor worship and the transformation of the household]. Tokyo: Nihon Kitoku Kyodan Shuppankyoku.
Nakasuji, Y. (2006) *Shi no bunka no hikaku shakaigaku* [The comparative sociology of the culture of death]. Matsudō: Azusa Shuppansha.
Ohnuki-Tierney, E. (2002). *Kamikaze, cherry blossoms, and nationalisms: The militarization of aesthetics in Japanese history*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Ohnuki-Tierney, E. (2007). *Kamikaze diaries: Reflections of Japanese student soldiers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Ozawa de Silva, C. (2008). Too lonely to die alone: Internet suicide pacts and existential suffering in Japan. *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry, 32*(4), 516–551.
Plath, D. W. (1964). Where the family of god is the family: The role of the dead in Japanese households. *American Anthropologist, 66*(2), 300–317.

Reader, I. (1991). *Religion in contemporary Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
Reader, I. (2012). Secularisation R. I. P.? Nonsense! The 'Rush Hour Away from the Gods' and the decline of religion in contemporary Japan. *Journal of Japanese Religious Studies, 1*, 7–36.
Saitō, H. (2015). *Hito wa shindara dō naru no ka?* [What happens after people die?]. Tokyo: Genshisha.
Satō, Y. (2016). *Hito wa shindara dō naru no ka*: *ano yo no rūru* [What happens after people die—The rules of the other world]. Tokyo: Gentosha.
Shimada, H. (2016). *Nihonjin no shiseikan to sooshiki* [Funerals and Japanese views of life and death]. Tokyo: Kairyusha.
Smith, R. J. (1974). *Ancestor worship in contemporary Japan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Smith, R. J. (1983). *Japanese society: Tradition, self, and the social order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Stone, J. I., & Walter, M. N. (Eds.). (2008). *Death and the afterlife in Japanese Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
Suzuki, H. (2002). *The Price of death: The funeral industry in contemporary Japan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Suzuki, H. (2003). McFunerals: The transition of Japanese funerary services. *Asian Anthropology, 2*, 49–78.
Suzuki, H. (Ed.). (2013a). *Death and dying in contemporary Japan*. London: Routledge.
Suzuki, I. (2013b). Beyond ancestor worship: Continued relationship with significant others. In H. Suzuki (Ed.), *Death and dying in contemporary Japan* (pp. 141–156). London: Routledge.
Turner, J. (1985). *Without god, without creed: The origins of unbelief in America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
Walter, T. (1996). *The eclipse of eternity: A sociology of the afterlife*. London: Macmillan.
Wolf, M. (1972). *Women and the family in rural Taiwan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Zuckerman, P. (2016). *The nonreligious: Understanding secular people and societies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Return to Nature? Secularism and Politics of Death Space in Hong Kong

Yuk Wah Chan

Abstract This chapter examines the politics of death space in Hong Kong. It explains the shrinkage of death time and space over the past few decades, and highlights the newest debates on the shortage of urn spaces for the interment of human cremains. In order to reduce the pressure on land resources for accommodating the dead, the government since the late 2000s has put in great efforts to promote sea burial, which requires no land space. Yet, Hong Kong Chinese, who still practice ancestral worship and carry on with the tradition of grave-sweeping, are yet to consider this as an appropriate way to handle ancestors' ashes. The chapter will provide a description of the major change in Hong Kong's death management since the mid-1950s and show how death space politics has been part of the overall land politics which evolves together with the uncertainty of Hong Kong's political future.

Keywords Death space politics · Cremation · Sea burial · Ancestral worship

Introduction

Since the middle of the twentieth century, Hong Kong has been concerned about the scarcity of death space. In the face of the huge pressure on land resources for urban settlement and development, different ruling regimes, from the colonial government to the current SAR (Special Administrative Region) administration, had debated about the competition between the living and deceased for land space. There were deep concerns about the shortage of burial plots in the 1960s and 1970s.

The popularization of cremation in the 1980s and 1990s proved to be a successful way for reducing the bulk of the deceased and saving death space. Yet, at the turn of the century, Hong Kong began to face a new challenge of death space scarcity. The full occupancy of public columbaria has put great pressure on the government to

Y. W. Chan (✉)
Department of Asian and International Studies, City University of Hong Kong, Kowloon, Hong Kong
e-mail: yukchan@cityu.edu.hk

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_4

build new repository premises for the storage of human ashes. However, there have been different oppositions to new trajectories. Some propose that land is scarce in Hong Kong, and the government should consider the needs of the living first, instead of continuously using up precious land to build houses for the dead. Another view is that a columbarium is the space for the dead and should be located far away from the space of the living. Fierce debates among district councilors about the proper locations of new columbaria, and the opposition to building one in one's own district, delayed the progress of new establishments.

Adding to the death space debate was a new policy implemented in mid 2017, which forbade the sale of new urn niches by private columbaria. According to this new law, all private columbaria are required to apply for a government license before they can operate their business again. This immediately aggravated the urn niches scare. Many Chinese families who had a new death at home suffered doubly – suffering from the loss of family members as well as from the struggle of searching for a place to store the cremated remains of the deceased. By October 2018, there was still no news when the government would finish reviewing the applications and issue columbarium licenses.

This chapter seeks to examine the politics of death space in Hong Kong. While most Chinese families are still practicing the traditions of ancestral worship, trying to connect to the deceased through memorial services and grave-sweeping, those who could not find a place for settling the cremains of their family members might have to succumb to the new practice of scattering ashes in memorial gardens and at sea. Since the late 2000s, the government has packaged such new death practices with the discourses of 'returning to nature' and 'being free'. Such romantic imageries of death have appealed to some local Chinese, but the majority still stick to the traditional way of using an urn space. The following discussions are based on my research on death management in Hong Kong since the 2000s. New field work and interviews were conducted in 2018. Interviews were carried out with two coffin shop managers, one representative of the Hong Kong Funeral Business Association, a Buddhist master and a Taoist priest. [Coffin shops used to sell coffins in the funerary business before the 1980s. Since then, coffin shops have expanded their service by providing funerary service packages that include coffins, paper offerings, ritual team services, and the newest service of temporary repository for the dead.] New data on deaths and the disposal of cremains were sought from relevant government departments and websites.

Chinese Death Studies and the Changing Death Practices in Hong Kong

There are two recurrent themes in Chinese death and funerary rituals studies. One concerns the containment of death pollution (Watson 1982, 1988a, b; Tong 2004). The other concerns ancestral worship and the continued links between the living and

the dead (Ahern 1973; Wolf 1970; R. Watson 1988b). In Chinese death traditions, a peaceful burial (*an zang* 安葬) is often stressed to ensure a good afterlife for the deceased (Yu 1987: 380), and a settled soul of the dead is related to the peaceful and prosperous life of the living (Ahern 1973; Harrell, 1979). In other words, the living and the deceased are linked in a reciprocal ancestor-descendent relationship. Thus, the fate of the deceased is an important concern of the living (Tong 2004). Ancestral worship is indeed an essential part of Chinese death culture and practices (Wolf 1974; Freedman 1974, 1979; Nelson 1974).

However, a peaceful burial was no longer always possible in Hong Kong since the 1970s, as burial plots were often in shortage. The government's conscious control of death space had gradually shaped and changed death practices from burial to cremation. In my previous studies on Hong Kong's death management, I have elaborated on the compression of time and space of funerary management since the second half of the twentieth century (Chan 2000, 2003).

Chinese death traditions in south China require descendants to hold elaborate funerary rituals for the dead, including seven 7-day (*da zhai* 打齋) rituals (Hase 1994) [*Da zhai* is a general term for the funerary rites performed by a team of Taoist priests.]. Some may continue till they finish the hundredth-day *da zhai*. However, modern living patterns did not allow urban families to conduct prolonged funerary rituals. Instead, an increasing number of families adopted the 2-day model of mortuary services (Chan 2000). The first day was to have a Taoist ritual group perform the *da jai* ritual at a funeral house for the dead in the vigil. The second day was for performing a simple ritual called *dan fan mai shui* (擔幡買水) under the guidance of a Taoist priest before sending the corpse to the crematorium. [*Dan fan mai shui* is a rite particularly performed by the eldest son for his deceased parents in order to lead them safely onto the path of the other world.] Moreover, before the 1950s, well-off families might make use of the open space nearby one's home to construct temporary pavilions to hold a few days of funerary service. Super rich families would organize funerary processions accompanied by music bands and carry the corpse all the way from home to the burial place. Since the late 1960s, sound control and city order requirements in public areas led to the disappearance of funerary processions (Chan 2000).

As a result, there was shrinkage of time and space regarding the holding of funerary rituals. At the same time, the popularization of cremation has also disrupted the Chinese tradition of peaceful burial. Without much choice, Chinese families gradually adopted cremation by the 1980s. In 1980, the number of cremations first exceeded that of burial (Chan 2000), and in the 2000s, over 80 percent of the dead were cremated (Chan 2016). Indeed, the debate of the shortage of land for the dead has been there since the mid-twentieth century. From lacking land for burial in the last few decades of the previous century, the debate continued into the new millennium and the new focus was about the shortage of urn spaces.

Hong Kong's Death Management, 1950–1990

Most of the cemeteries and funerary facilities established by the colonial government in the late 19th and early twentieth century were not for serving the majority of Chinese families, but for the Europeans and other foreign populations who were Christians, Hindu, Muslims and Jewish (Ko 2005; Teather 1999a; Ying 2010. The majority Chinese population who came from China to make a living in the colonial city were unable to find proper burial sites. Only the elite Chinese with higher social status or who were naturalized as British, or had converted to Christianity were able to reserve a spot in the colonial graveyards (Chan 2016: 315). As a result, in the first half of the twentieth century, it was a common practice amongst the poor population that dead bodies were buried at hillsides or dumped along the roadside in the urban areas (Chan 2016, 320; Faure 1997). At the same time, a charity group, the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals (operated by elite Chinese in the colonial city) also provided some help to solve the problem. The Group provided three services. First, it operated a repository house in the Hong Kong Island to store dead bodies until families were able to transport the body back to China for burial. Second, it built a few pavilions in the city for families to hold simple funerary rituals before dead bodies were interred. Third, it constructed a few graveyards in urban areas to bury those who died in the Group's hospitals and pauper deaths (BDTWG 1970–1971; Chan 2000).

In the 1940s, the colonial government saw a great need to regulate burial sites in order to clear space for urban development. It ordered the Tung Wah Group to exhume all its graves and closed them. By 1951, all exhumed human remains from the Group's cemeteries were cremated and relocated to the remote Wo Hop Shek cemetery built by the government (BDTWG 1970–1971). In fact, clearing off graveyards of the majority Chinese to make space for urban redevelopment was also performed by the British colonial government in Singapore in the late 19th and early twentieth century (Yeoh 2003; Davies 1997). While Chinese graveyards were removed, those of the Europeans stayed intact. From 1940 to 1989, there were in total six cemeteries constructed by the Hong Kong government. All along these times, despite the construction of new cemeteries, there were grave concerns about insufficient burial plots (see Chan 2016, 318–322).

In order to reduce the pressure on land for building burial sites, the Hong Kong colonial government began to promote rigorously the practice of cremation in the 1960s. In fact, the U.K. was one of those most enthusiastic about promoting cremation in Europe (Davies and Mates 2005). According to local workers in the funerary industry, there was in the beginning strong resistance against it. Some aged people were even willing to change their religion for the sake of getting a chance to be interred into the ground. In Hong Kong, it was easier for Christians to get a burial plot since some cemeteries were managed by Christian organizations solely to serve the believers. However, despite some resistance and Chinese's stress on a good earth burial after death, the vast Chinese population in Hong Kong had come to accept cremation by the 1990s (Chan 2016). In 2017, over 93 percent of the deceased were cremated (see Table 1). Thus, cremation is the most common way of handling dead bodies.

Table 1 Number of cremations performed in public crematoria (2010–2017)

Year	Death	Cremation	% of cremation
2017	45,883	42,809	93.3
2016	46,662	43,556	93.3
2015	46,757	42,737	91.4
2014	45,710	41,244	90.2
2013	43,399	38,914	89.7
2012	43,672	39,494	90.4
2011	42,188	37,916	89.9
2010	42,705	38,006	89.0

Source: Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

The popularization of cremation among the Chinese population in Hong Kong can be considered evidence of the successful strategy employed by the colonial government to save space for the living. It took the government around three decades to render cremation the most popular way of treating dead bodies. Yet, it does not mean that the families will then casually dispose of the ashes. After cremation, the cremains (in the form of ashes) are commonly put into ash urns and then stored in the urn niches of private or public columbaria. Many of the private columbaria were run by Taoist temples, Buddhist monasteries, or other private organizations.

Like earth burial, the interment of these cremains is accomplished by solemn funerary rituals guided by a religious master, such as a Taoist priest. For earth burial, the interment ritual is called *xia zang* (descending the burial site, 下葬), while that for storing the cremains is called *shang wei* (ascending to the niche, 上位). The ritual involves opening the niche with auspicious rites to let the deceased settle peacefully in the 'new house'. Thus, to Chinese families in Hong Kong, although the bodies are cremated, the souls of the deceased family member continue to live and connect with the families in the earthly world. The ashes are still the focal point to link the deceased with the living. Placing the ashes in a proper ash niche is as important as burying the deceased in the graveyard.

The urn niche, like the burial plot, is perceived as a proper new home for the deceased (Teather 1999b). Families visit these niches in the columbaria during grave-sweeping seasons and memorial days. If the ashes are not buried properly in a safe place, the descendants would have no place to visit during these days and would have felt disconnected and disarrayed. The interment of human ashes in niches and the practice of grave-sweeping at the columbaria is a good case of both cultural transformation and maintenance – showing how traditions have adapted to environmental changes and reinvented into a new form. [Grave-sweeping or tomb-sweeping is a Chinese practice in which people go to the cemetery to clean and sweep the graves of their ancestors, which is like an annual clean-up of one's house. Grave-sweeping is usually practiced during the Ching Ming Festival in spring or Chung Yeung Festival in autumn]. Bodies are cremated, but souls still survive, and people carry on with the tradition of ancestral worship.

Entering the 2000s, the Hong Kong government faced a new challenge in the management of death space. It came to realize that urn niches were increasingly in great

shortage (Apple Daily 2006, 2008). With Hong Kong having an average yearly death of around 45,000, the shortage of urn spaces might reach 400,000 by 2023 (Blundy and Davis 2017). Although the interment of ash urns has already required much less space than burials, to such a small city as Hong Kong, the land is considered too valuable for continually constructing columbaria.

To sum up, the popularization of cremation had successfully helped to reduce the bulk of the dead bodies; human cremains need much less space for storage. Public and private columbaria were effective ways to place human ashes in the 1980s and 1990s. However, it soon became obvious that this change in death management brought a new problem by the 2000s. Urn niches became increasingly scarce. Prices of such niches in private premises shot up. The price of some niches can be from a few hundred thousands (Chan 2016) to a million Hong Kong dollars (Blundy and Davis 2017), which is much more expensive than a condominium by calculating the price of each square foot. Thus, the government began to promote alternative ways of handling human cremains. Moreover, because of the sprouting of illegitimate columbaria business, the government also felt the need to regulate private columbaria.

Death Management Since the 2000s

In order to reduce the pressures on Hong Kong's public land, the Hong Kong government suggested new ways of storing human ashes. In the official guidebook on death management issued in 2000, there were suggestions to store ashes at home and to scatter ashes in the public Garden of Remembrance (UC and RC n.d.). After a decade, obviously noting that 'storing ashes at home' is not a palatable choice to the majority of Chinese families, the government in the new guidebook issued in 2010 put the suggestion of 'storing at home' as last in the list. On the top of the list, it says: 'scatter in designated water'. This is also labelled 'sea burial' (*hai zang*, 海葬), which became the newest alternative way of handling human cremains.

In tandem with this new development in handling ashes, the great demand for ash urn storage had generated a lucrative business. Many tried to build private temples or columbaria in order to sell expensive ash urn niches. Some were even situated in old factory buildings. Others breached land use regulations or unlawfully occupied public lands. The messy and unregulated funerary structures and columbaria aroused district councilors' and legislators' concern and a series of social debates continued. After some consultation with the public (FEHD 2010), the government finally implemented a new law on the regulation of private columbarium (the Private Columbaria Ordinance) on 30 June, 2017, requiring all such private establishments to obtain a license issued by the Private Columbaria Licensing Board. The promulgation of such a law has basically made the majority of the private ash storage structures illegal. Many had to immediately file a temporary suspension of liability application before they applied for the license. Within the 3-month period for the submission of columbaria license application (from late December 2017 to late March 2018), there were over 140 applications. Till mid-October, 2018, no result had been announced yet.

The stoppage of the operation of these private columbaria had further aggravated the scarcity of 'death space'. Many families were forced to seek temporary ash repository services. Before this law, some families were already using such ash storage services provided by coffin shops. They paid a daily HK $10 fee for such a service (Chan 2016). [Hung Hom is commonly known as a district for the dead. There are three funeral homes where people hold funerary rituals for the vigil. It is also a district with most coffin shops]. Mr. Cheung, a manager of one of the coffin shops in Hung Hom said, 'Some families had already stored their ashes here for more than 5 years. Now the 10-. dollar storage service is no longer available. Shops are charging people HK$300 to HK$800 every month for such service.'

Since 2017, the government also provided temporary repository space for human ashes at public premises. One was at the Kwai Chung Crematorium, while the other was at the Wo Hop Shek Cemetery. It costs families a monthly rent of HK$80 to place ashes there. However, workers in the industry said that the service was not particularly welcomed by local citizens. A funerary professional commented, 'Chinese people need to visit their ancestors during Ching Ming and Chung Yeung Festival. The public officers in those premises did not take out the ashes (either in a bag or in an urn) for people to worship them. You let people place the ashes there, but don't allow them to worship (*bai*), that is meaningless.'

Compared to the public repository service, the service offered by coffin shops seems more flexible. Some coffin shops will burn incense daily for the ashes. At festive times, coffin shops in Hung Hom become the spots for families to sweep graves. The shopkeepers open some tables in front of their shops (see Figs. 1, 2 and 3) and

Fig. 1 Chinese families worshipping the deceased at coffin shops in the Hung Hom district of Hong Kong. (Photo by Yuk Wah Chan, 17 Oct 2018)

Fig. 2 Before attaining an urn niche at a columbarium, families have to rely on the temporary repository service of the coffin shops. (Photo by Yuk Wah Chan, 17 Oct 2018)

place the ashes belonging to the deceased member of different families there, so that people can worship and make offerings. Mr. Cheung described the situation like this:

> We had provided this service for almost a decade already. In the beginning, we just wanted to help solve the immediate difficulties of our clients. However, the situation became worse, since the government is incapable of providing sufficient urn niches for Hong Kong people. Many families had left their ancestors' ashes here for five to six years. My shop is now hosting 200 dead people's ashes. During Ching Ming Festival, Hung Hom became a new spot for people to 'sweep graves'. It was really crowded.

On the Chung Yeung day, two aged men were waiting outside one of the coffin shops at Hung Hom to worship their deceased family member. One of them talked about his feeling:

> We have put the ashes here for 2 years already. We are still waiting for a public urn niche at the Cape Collinson Columbarium. I feel remorseful and unhappy to see her not having a place to live after death. It is really not good. Only after settling this would we feel at ease. In the future, we may not have a chance to be put into an urn. Probably we would just be scattered in the garden (of remembrance). The young would not care now.

Fig. 3 A car with a paper driver to be offered to the deceased. (Photo by Yuk Wah Chan, 17 Oct 2018)

Secularism or Naturalism: Hong Kong Government's 'Death' Attitude

As mentioned, since the 2000s the government, well-aware of the scarcity of death space, had begun to promote spaceless burial practices, which are summarily labeled by the government as 'green burial', including scattering ashes of the deceased in the Garden of Remembrance, and scattering ashes in Hong Kong's designated sea waters. For the former, the government just needs to construct a garden and ashes of the deceased can be lumped into the grass lawns in the garden. For the latter, ashes are scattered into the sea, thus, no land space is needed.

To Be Free After Death

On the government website regarding the practice of sea burial (FEHD 2018a), there is a promotional video featuring the narratives of a renowned Hong Kong-based writer, Benny S. Y. Li. The video begins with a shot of a seagull flying in the

sky, then the scene is fixed on a byline reading: 'I hear freedom in the wind'. Following this introductory scene, there is the narrative of Li.

> Our body is in essence a shell. You can see it as a piece of clothing. The body is but a shell. At the loss of loved ones, many people find it hard to let go. They can't let go because they don't know where the deceased are going. But if the deceased are placed in the care of nature, you can let go because you seem to know where they are. Missing a loved one is a matter of the heart; the formality is not that important. Some people may take it heavy-heartedly, I would rather take it easy. I scattered my father-in-law's ashes. He loved travelling throughout his life. When his ashes were drifting further away in the ocean, I felt like he had gone to another world, to continue travelling freely, living a happy life both in this and the other world.

The video then advertises this:

> The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department provides free ferry services to the public for scattering cremated ashes and holding memorial ceremonies in designated waters.

A scene follows showing a young couple with two small daughters tossing flower petals into the sea. The narrator, Li, adds the following two lines:

> I find scattering ashes at sea very meaningful. It helps our loved ones return to nature and set out on a new journey.

The video ends with one statement on the screen: *Join the boundless and be free.* To draw more interest in sea burial, not only does the government use larger vessels to take families to the designated water and allow them to hold simple farewell ceremonies based on the families' religions, it also provides free webpage design services to assist family members to create personalized memorial pages for the deceased on the official Internet Memorial Service. Moreover, there is free ferry transport to bring the families back to the sea around the Ching Ming Festival so that they can pay tributes to the deceased (FEHD 2018b).

The government claimed that over the past decade, people adopting sea burial has increased a lot, from 160 applications in 2007 to 877 in 2015 (FHB 2016). Together with the cases of scattering ashes in the Garden of Remembrance, the total number of families adopting green burials increased to 5932 cases, taking up 12.9% of the total number of deaths in 2017 (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 2 Number of 'green burials' (2010–2017)

Year	No. of cases scattering of ashes in Gardens of Remembrance	No. of cases scattering of ashes at sea
2017	4966	966
2016	4004	900
2015	3196	877
2014	2697	856
2013	2354	797
2012	2023	791
2011	1648	611
2010	1171	804

Source: Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

In the last quarter of the year 2018, the Food, Environment and Health Department (FEHD) organized a series of green burial promotional talks at different residential districts. Around 300 people, mostly aged citizens, attended one of these talks. A FEHD officer opened the talk like this:

> The government is now introducing green burial to the public. We all know that urn niches are houses of the yin, while living beings live in houses of the yang. Yang houses can be transferred from one generation to another generation. However, yin houses cannot be transferred, the transferrable rate is low. Since Hong Kong's land resource is scarce, this (way of providing yin houses) is not a sustainable mode for Hong Kong's development….

Besides introducing different details and the good services of green burials, the talk also included some explanations of the implementation of the new law on regulating private columbaria. Officers reminded attendants not to be cheated by those columbaria businesses, which claimed to be able to store ashes. Following the talk, the officers were bombarded by many queries and questions from the audience. Most were about the shortage of urn spaces and what to do if private columbaria could not obtain the government license.

Critique and Discussion

It is quite clear that the government's purpose of promoting green burial is to reduce the use of land space for the deceased. Hong Kong's land space is limited, and housing issues for the living have already led to a lot of social debates and tensions. From a secular point of view, it seems logical that the government should not waste valuable land resources to accommodate those who have already died. In order to reduce the further use of land space by the deceased, it sounds like a pragmatic consideration for the government to push for the green ways of disposing the dead's bodily remains.

While it is obvious that the intention and practical outcome of green burials is to save land, the government has made great efforts in packaging the discourses of green burials with the rhetoric and imagery of naturalism (returning to nature) and freedom. This implies that, by adopting green burial, one will be able to use one's body to nourish the nature and be as free as a seagull. On the website of FEHD, there are at least four videos promoting sea and garden burials. However, both the sea burial and the garden burial videos are narrated by someone who had treated his parent-in-law in this way, and who did not mention anything about the will of the deceased. In the sea burial video, the narrator has made some wishful thinking for the plights of the deceased: 'He loved travelling throughout his life. When his ashes were drifting further away in the ocean, I felt like he had gone to another world, to continue travelling freely, living a happy life both in this and the other world.'

A Buddhist master commented, from the Buddhist point of view, one should not be attached to one's bodily form. Buddhists consider the body is nothing but a combination of the four elements (earth, water, fire, wind). These elements come

together to give it a form. When one dies, the elements disintegrate and should return to nature. Whether green burial or the traditional earth burial, the results are the same.

However, if people do not understand this, and are still attached to their bodily form when they die, they may not be voluntarily picking the new way. Anger and resentment may arise if they are forced to. Green burial has to be accompanied by a green heart (see Buddhist in Hong Kong 2016).

Thus, it is important to respect the wish of the deceased. Since Chinese still have the traditional conception about death and stress the importance of an appropriate treatment of the dead body, it is better for the children or other family members to understand the wishes of the elderly before they pass away to make sure there would not be a conflict with the wish of the deceased.

Agnosticism or Superstition: Hong Kong Chinese Citizens' 'Death' Attitude

The Skeptics and Agnostics

What is life like after death? Nobody can satisfactorily answer this question. Although Hong Kong claims to be a global city and most people lead a modern urban life, many Chinese families in Hong Kong still follow folk religious practices, which include visiting temples and monasteries now and then to worship gods and saints for good luck, consulting Fengshui masters for ensuring good fortune before they move into a new house or a new office, and practicing ancestral worship such as grave-sweeping at memorial days. Following these practices, however, does not imply that these followers are devoted Buddhists or Taoists. Indeed, folk religious practices in many Chinese societies have been very mixed with Buddhist and Taoist philosophies; not many would be able to distinguish the principles and practices of each of these with clear boundaries.

On the other hand, as my previous studies have found, among the younger generations, many claimed that they do not follow any particular religion and cannot be sure if there is life after death. Some of them queried the effectiveness of the funerary rituals on the destiny of the deceased, while others doubted whether the deceased grandpa or grandma would really receive the paper offerings (Chan 2000: 83–86). However, the agnostics still follow traditional death practices, including burning incense for the deceased, burning paper offerings for them, and bringing them their favorite foods when they go to visit their graves. Some would say they were just following what their parents had done for the grandparents, or what the elderly told them to do. There were also people who claimed that they did not believe there is life after death. However, at the time of facing a new death in the family, some of these people would turn to become more religious. For example, they would try to follow more closely the elaborate religious rituals for the dead and burn a lot of offerings (Chan 2000: 87–92).

A coffin shop salesperson said, 'In the 1980s and 1990s, people in Hong Kong in general were more at ease about funerary rituals. We often told them that they should not be too stubborn about these things. It is more important that people do things to respect the deceased's wishes. We also told them one should not be too superstitious because Hong Kong is more advanced now. People are no longer living like the old days.'

Because of these kinds of anti-superstition discourses along with the skepticism and agnosticism in the younger generations, people were said to have become less superstitious and less attached to traditions. They also became more tolerant towards new ways of death management, such as cremation. When more and more people accepted this practice, others followed suit. Some funerary professionals described this as 'following the big rolls' (Chan 2000: 107–109, 112–117).

Regardless of the replacement of burial by cremation, people are still concerned about the cremated remains and would like to bury them properly. In people's minds, to have a place (whether a burial plot or an urn space) to store the body remains of the deceased family member is still important. It indicates that the deceased is taken care of and has a place to go, and the living also have a place to visit for grave-sweeping.

Sea Burial Is Repulsive

In the talk organized by the FEHD, one aged female participant said:

> The worst way is scattering ashes into the sea…that means being eaten by fishes! Although I don't feel anything after death, it is not good to be eaten.

Many elderly still find the idea of scattering one's body remains into the sea repulsive. One 70 year-old lady said, 'I can't accept this, because it is like dying without a home, drifting to nowhere (*si chu piao dang*, 四處漂盪).' It is clear that the older generations are less able to welcome this new practice. Young people in their 30s and 40s also told the author that they would not feel good to scatter the ashes of the deceased into the sea. The gesture felt like they did not want to take care of their parents anymore.

Despite the great efforts of the government in promoting green burials, Hong Kong Chinese families are not particularly enthusiastic about it. The government provided statistics to claim that green burials had increased rapidly. However, most increases lie in garden burial, rather than sea burial. The practice of sea burial increased slowly, from 804 cases in 2010 to 966 cases in 2017 (see Table 2).

Currently, the FEHD also provides free ferry service to bring those families adopting the practice of sea burial to the sea to pay tribute to the deceased at the Ching Ming and Chung Yeung Festival. A Taoist ritual master commented:

> This shows the government's effort to put the concerned families at ease. In fact, the recent push for sea burial will have a great impact on HK's death practices. It was like 40 years ago, when cremation was promoted to replace the practice of earth burial. Now we need to

> pay attention to how people adapt to this change. HK has a fast-changing culture, I believe a larger number of people will accept the new ways in a decade or so.

The master also added that there was a trend for families who adopted sea burial to buy a 'tablet' niche at monasteries or temples to 'house' the ancestor. Thus, during Ching Ming festival, the family can go to sweep graves. [A tablet niche is like an urn niche, which is used for setting up a tablet with the ancestor's name on it].

Furthermore, in order to attract those who accept more modern ideas about death management, the government has created free webpages for families to honour the dead through the Internet. It stresses that one can worship and memorialize the deceased whenever and wherever one wants. A funerary worker opined:

> Grave-sweeping during Ching Ming and Chung Yeung is a family event. It stresses that the family is one unified unit and the worshipping in spring and autumn is a chance for family members to come together in the memory of the ancestor, and to continue this tradition of linking the ancestors with the descendants. Personalized webpage and individual worshipping would not help enhance family unity.

The government also put efforts to promote green burial to old people at elderly centres. One aged participant at the FEHD talk said:

> Those who do not have children and relied on the care of the nurses at elderly centres do not mind their ashes scattered at sea. But we need to have a friend or someone we entrust to do such application for us after our death. Sometimes, the person we entrust even dies before us…who can do this application for us?

This participant asked for the arrangement of pre-death application of sea burial. But at the moment, there was not such a service yet.

Dying Without a Place to Rest?

Quite a number of participants queried why the government did not provide new spaces first before it implemented the new regulatory law. One participant said:

> The government has for many years not been able to provide enough niches, so we citizens solved the problem by ourselves. I bought private niches for my family two decades ago by paying HK$200,000. But the government now suddenly made private columbaria illegal, I was unable to bury my mother who died recently. We bought this niche with real money, but we can't use it now. We are taxpayers, we are not robbers! Why can't we die in good manners? The government makes us die without a burial place!

Indeed, 'dying without a burial place' is a curse. The man who said the above was supported by other participants. There were many others who queried why the government stopped the operation of the private columbaria which had been in operation for decades. Some participants grumbled while leaving the community hall, 'We better not die these days, otherwise we won't have a place to live!'

Funerary workers in coffin shops told the author that many people made complaints because of the lack of death space. People need a space to settle the soul of the dead. The industry was under great pressure to handle the ashes for their clients.

They estimated that there were tens of thousands bags of ashes still temporarily stored in the 80 coffin shops in Hong Kong. 'People are screaming for help,' one coffin shop manager said. 'If the government could not solve the problem carefully, people might go for a strike carrying with them the urns and ashes of their ancestors!' Furthermore, because of the new columbaria law and the pending issuance of licenses, many private columbaria began a policy of not allowing people to burn incense and paper offerings during grave-sweeping days. This upset a large number of families who paid homage to the ancestors at Ching Ming and Chung Yeung Festival.

Connections Between Living and Dead

As mentioned above, in Chinese traditions, death rituals, funerals, and the handling of the dead body are all considered to have effects on the destiny of the deceased, and thus on the fortune of living. An auspicious funeral and a good settlement of the soul of the deceased will ensure the fortune of the family members who are still alive. A representative from the Funeral Business Association stressed that it took four decades for the government to make Hong Kong people accept cremation. Now, the government wants people to accept sea burial. It would require much more time to persuade people to do it. This representative said:

> As long as people still feel the need to visit the dead and '*bai*' (worship, 拜) the ancestors during Ching Ming and Chung Yeung, they would not feel at ease to scatter the ashes into the sea. Perhaps in another forty years, people will gradually accept new ways. But in the meantime, the government should make a good and long-sighted policy to let people feel at ease. But what happened is it can neither take good care of the living nor the dead. The government should at least make good plans till 2047. [Hong Kong will maintain its present status quo as an autonomous special administrative region till 2047]. It should issue and extend the license for all present private columbaria till the year of 2047. Then it is not its responsibility to solve these problems.

Hong Kong is now troubled by the shortage of death space, as people believe the proper of interment of dead people's bodily remains is a way to show the care of the descendants for the deceased and that will also affect the future of the deceased. A Buddhist master opined, in India, people cremated corpses and scattered the ashes into the Ganges, which is considered sacred water. Thus, scattering one's body remains in the Ganges is a sacred death. In Tibet, Buddhists on the other hand practice sky burial. Dead bodies are cut into pieces to be devoured by eagles. This is considered another form of sacred death – giving one's body to nature. Indeed, these different traditions point to the fact that even among the Buddhists, there are different ways to handle the dead body. What is good is defined by the death customs of the society. After all, the body is only one of the material forms of existence. The interment of one's ashes does not ensure a good afterlife for them.

From the Buddhist perspective, death is the time for one to undergo reincarnation. But how one's next life will be like does not depend on the way one is buried,

but on one's deeds during his/her lifetime. What is more important is to take care of the parents when they are still alive, and let them do good deeds, practice compassion and have less attachment to the material world. Without really understanding life after death, descendants may not be able to do the best for the deceased.

Conclusion: A Migrant City and a Place Called Home

Hong Kong was a migrant city. Before the mid-twentieth century, many who lived in Hong Kong came from China for work and trade and cherished the hope to return to China when they aged. They also wished to be buried in China where their roots lay. Not unlike other Chinese migrant cities in Asia, Hong Kong acted as a transitory centre for the Chinese (see, for example, Tong 2004: 54–55). However, the situation had changed since the second half of the twentieth century. Hong Kong witnessed decades of turbulence and migrant influxes; waves and waves of migrants and refugees poured into Hong Kong from the 1950s to 1980s, both from China and elsewhere. From the 1970s to 2000s, Hong Kong went through rapid development to become a highly urbanized and populous city, becoming well known for its prosperous economy and financial market. The post WWII generations see Hong Kong as home, and no longer feel it necessary to return to China after death. In other words, both the living and the dead see Hong Kong as home. People yearn for a place to be interred after death, and yet, such a space seems scarcer and scarcer.

Death space shortages and debates are not anything new in Hong Kong. One century ago, the colonialists, the Europeans and the believers enjoyed more privileges over death space than the local Chinese and the non-believers. Ordinary local Chinese and the non-believers did not have such a privilege. One had to be of the 'correct race, religion or class' for the attainment of a proper burial site (Chan 2016, 339).

One century afterwards, there is still death space politics, which has created a conflict and the competition (for space) between the living and the dead. Because of this competition, one seems to turn into a refugee after death, losing one's identity and being denied a place to live. To further complicate the issue of death space, Hong Kong people also need to worry about what would happen in 2047, the time when Hong Kong will cease to be a special administrative region. What will then be the policy of Beijing towards Hong Kong? Will there be a drastic change in land policy and ownership? Will all premises need to return the land use right to the ruling regime? Will Hong Kong people enjoy more land resources due to its further integration with China so that there will be more death space?

Culture itself is fluid; it shifts over time, but it also stays in recreated forms. Death culture and practices in Hong Kong have shifted over the past century along with the changing urban landscape of life, and also with the evolution of politics. Death space debates inevitably are concerned with overall land politics as well as the political uncertainty of the pending deadline of 2047. When one is not sure

about life, one can't be sure about death. The uncertain political changes in the city's future will certainly have an impact on its ongoing death space politics and struggles.

References

Ahern, E. (1973). *The cult of the dead in a Chinese village*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Apple Daily. (2006). 500 people queued up, fighting for ash niches. 27 June.

Apple Daily. (2008). Lacking 140,000 public ash niches. 20 November.

Blundy, R., & Davis, H. (2017). Why dying in Hong Kong is getting more complicated and expensive. *South China Morning Post*, 15 July, https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education-community/article/2102544/why-dying-hong-kong-getting-more-complicated-and. Accessed 15 Sept 2018.

Board of Directors of Tung Wah Group (BDTWG). (Eds.). (1970–1971). *One hundred years of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, 1870–1970*. Hong Kong: Tung Wah Group.

Buddhist in Hong Kong. (2016). Use a green heart to face death. *Buddhist in Hong Kong, 671*, 15–16.

Chan, Y. W. (2000). *Management of death in Hong Kong*. Unpublished M.Phil. thesis, Department of Anthropology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Chan, Y. W. (2003). Packaging tradition: Chinese death management in urban Hong Kong. *Asian Anthropology, 2*(1), 139–159.

Chan, Y. W. (2016). Where to die? Death management and the politics of death space in Hong Kong. In M. Dickhardt & A. Lauser (Eds.), *Religion, place and modernity in East and Southeast Asia* (pp. 312–342). Leiden: Brill.

Davies, D. J. (1997). *Death, ritual and belief: The rhetoric of funerary rites*. London: Cassell.

Davies, D. J., & Mates, L. H. (Eds.). (2005). *Encyclopedia of cremation*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.

Faure, D. (Ed.). (1997). *A documentary history of Hong Kong society*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

FEHD. (2018a). *Sea burial promotional video*. https://www.greenburial.gov.Hong Kong/tc/scattering-cremains-sea/promotional-video.html. Accessed 25 August.

FEHD. (2018b). *Internet memorial service*. https://www.greenburial.gov.Hong Kong/tc/memorial/index.html. Accessed 25 August.

FEHD (Food and Environmental Hygiene Department). (2010). *A public consultation document on policy review on columbarium*. Hong Kong: Food and Environmental Hygiene Department.

FHB (Food and Health Bureau). (2016). *Legislative Council panel on food safety and environmental hygiene: Promotion of green burial* [LC Paper No. CB(2)1419/15-16(03)]. Hong Kong: Legislative Council.

Freedman, M. (1974). On the sociological study of Chinese religion. In A. Wolf (Ed.), *Religion and ritual in Chinese society* (pp. 19–41). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Freedman, M. (1979). Ancestor worship: Two facets of the Chinese case. In W. G. Skinner (Ed.), *The study of Chinese society: Essays by Maurice Freedman* (pp. 296–312). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Harrell, S. (1979). The concept of 'soul' in Chinese folk religion. *Journal of Asian Studies, 38*, 519–528.

Hase, P. (1994). Observations at a village funeral. In D. Faure, J. Hayes, & A. Birch (Eds.), *From village to city: Studies in the traditional roots of Hong Kong society* (pp. 129–163). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Ko T. K. (2005). The history of Hong Kong's cemeteries, 1841–1950 (香港墳場發展史略, 1841–1950). In M. Y. Leung & C. F. Cheung (Eds.), *Gazing into death: Multidisciplinary perspec-*

tives (凝視死亡: 死與人間的多元省思) (209–247). Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Nelson, H. G. H. (1974). Ancestor worship and burial practices. In A. P. Wolf (Ed.), *Religion and ritual in Chinese society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Teather, E. (1999a). Themes from complex landscapes: Chinese cemeteries and columbaria in urban Hong Kong. *Australian Geographical Studies, 36*(1), 21–36.

Teather, E. (1999b). High-rise homes for the ancestors: Cremation in Hong Kong. *Geographical Review, 89*(3), 409–430.

Tong, C. (2004). *Chinese death rituals in Singapore*. New York: RoutledgeCurzon.

UC & RC (Urban Council and Regional Council). (n.d.). *What to do when someone dies.…* Hong Kong: Urban Council and Regional Council.

Watson, J. L. (1982). Of flesh and bones: The management of death pollution in Cantonese society. In M. Bloch & P. Jonathan (Eds.), *Death and the regeneration of life* (pp. 155–186). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Watson, J. L. (1988a). Funeral specialists in Cantonese society: Pollution, performance and social hierarchy. In J. L. Watson & E. S. Rawski (Eds.), *Death ritual in late imperial and modern China* (pp. 109–134). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Watson, R. S. (1988b). Remembering the dead: Graves and politics in Southeastern China. In J. L. Watson & E. S. Rawski (Eds.), *Death ritual in late imperial and modern China* (pp. 203–227). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wolf, A. P. (1970). Chinese kinship and mourning dress. In M. Freedman (Ed.), *Family and kinship in Chinese society* (pp. 189–207). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Wolf, A. P. (1974). God, ghosts and ancestors. In A. Wolf (Ed.), *Religion and ritual in Chinese society* (pp. 131–182). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Yeoh, B. (2003). *Contesting space in colonial Singapore: Power relations and the urban built environment*. Singapore: Singapore University Press.

Ying, F. T. (2010). Peace in earth: Chinese Christian cemeteries in Hong Kong. In K. Ha (Ed.), *Graveyard studies: Seminar paper series* (墳場研究講座論文集) (23–38). Hong Kong: Center of Catholic Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Yu, Y. (1987). O soul, come back! A study in the changing conceptions of the soul and afterlife in pre-Buddhist China. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, 47*, 363–395.

Death and Dying: Belief, Fear and Ritual in Vietnamese Culture

Nguyen Duc Son and Giap Binh Nga

Abstract In this chapter we shall describe the way in which some Vietnamese people cope with death and dying. The beliefs, fears and rituals of people in the north of Vietnam are investigated. Despite some cultural differences, they are quite similar to people in other parts of the country.

Keywords Death and dying · Belief · Fear · Ritual · Attitude

Death and Dying

Death and dying are complex processes with implications for individuals, their families and friends, their care providers, and the health care system. Adequate preparation for death, and appropriate end-of-life care, may be hampered by the difficulty in predicting when death will occur, even for those with serious or terminal illnesses.

For persons who are dying, and their families and friends, the circumstances surrounding the event can result in a more or less comfortable and dignified experience. Dying can also be a great emotional and financial burden on families and caregivers. Because it can be associated with both physical and emotional pain and discomfort which may be mitigated with proper support for the individuals and those close to them, dying can be considered a major public health issue (Rao et al. 2002).

Dealing with death and dying is a personal process, influenced by culture, one's beliefs, how different health care providers communicate information and advice about prognosis, and many other individual and societal factors (Gruenewald, White 2006). Some people and cultures discourage talk about the possibility of dying, even when faced with a terminal illness, perhaps because they, their families, or their care providers do not want to give up hope of recovery (Wright et al. 2008).

N. D. Son (✉) · G. B. Nga
Hanoi National University of Education, Hanoi, Vietnam
e-mail: nguyensontlhnue.edu.vn@gmail.com

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_5

Death and Dying in Vietnamese Culture

In Vietnamese culture, religion dictates some of the rituals in the dying and bereavement process. In Buddhism, for older people who are ill and know they are going to die, death is acceptable and is not shocking for the family. Older Vietnamese people may prefer to be at home at the end of life with family members around them. If the older person has to die in the hospital or residential facility they may wish that family members have the opportunity to stay with them. If a person does not die at home, it is regarded as causing bad luck for the family. Dying people who are Buddhist may wish that a small group of monks stay with them during the last few hours of their life and pray (Vietnamese Cultural Profile 2009).

Prayers may be said for the sick person. If a person is expecting to die, people in the community want him or her to die peacefully. Old people that are ill are usually not afraid of dying, but this may depend on the condition or illness. Sometimes, the illness prolongs a life too long, and the family will be hurt by spending a lot of money and time on prolonging life, even if the patient will not get better. In some cases, because of the love and relationship between the family and the patient, the family tries to keep the dying person alive as long as possible without care about the cost. Some families are willing to pay for whatever is necessary. A family may use all of its worldly goods that can be transferred into money. In many cases, they may borrow from various associations. A terminally ill person who is expected to die usually prefers to die at home, with family members around them and with those they are close to at that time, rather than at the hospital (Owens and Lundgreen 2002).

Another point about death that is especially true in the Vietnamese community is that when someone dies, the family doesn't call upon emergency officials right away. First, they try to bring a monk to the scene. If the monk is not available, they try to bring some elderly people who can perform Vietnamese chanting. The prayer is done first, and then the officials are called. Meanwhile, among the more well-to-do, an obituary has been placed in the paper and friends begin to descend on the home. Among the poor people, the sad news is transmitted by word of mouth. In the case of death, it is very important to contact the family and ask them what they want to do before the officials come. Some people believe that within the body the brain may die but the heart is still working a little bit and the soul is around somewhere. This makes the last minutes of life a very important time for the person to settle down, to make himself ready for rebirth. Buddhists believe in rebirth and reincarnation. The death is just one thing that occurs for a person to be reborn somewhere else. The parents need to help the person to be reborn in a proper place by providing a peaceful and religious environment for death.

"The sense of the dead is that of the final" says a Vietnamese proverb, meaning that funeral ceremonies must be solemnly organized. In a traditional Vietnamese funeral ceremony, the deceased person's sons, daughters, and daughters-in-law had to wear coarse gauze turbans and tunics, and hats made of straw or of dry banana fiber. The deceased person's grandchildren and relatives also had to wear mourning turbans. During the days when the dead were still laid out at home, the mourning

went on with worshipping meals and mourning music. Relatives, neighbours, and friends came to offer their condolences.

The date and time for the funeral procession must be carefully selected. Relatives, friends, and descendants take part in the funeral procession to accompany the dead along the way to the burial ground. At the grave site, the coffin is buried and covered. After 3 days of mourning, the family visits the tomb again to worship the opening of the grave; after 49 days, the family stops bringing rice for the dead to the altar. And finally, after 100 days, the family celebrates the end of the tears. During this period of time, no family weddings can take place. After 1 year is the ceremony of the first anniversary of the relative's death and after 3 years, when the body is exhumed and the bone transferred from the wooden coffin to an earthenware box for final burial, is the ceremony of the end of mourning.

Nowadays, mourning ceremonies follow new rituals which are simplified; they consist of covering and putting the dead body into the coffin, the funeral procession, the burial of the coffin into the grave, and the visits to the tomb. The deceased person's family members wear a white turban or a black mourning band.

The graveyard's online ancestor worship service is the first of its kind in Vietnam. Busy relatives can purchase afterlife gifts — from flowers to boiled chickens to expensive cognac — by clicking a mouse. Cemetery staff bring the items to the tombs and send videos or photos of the display by email. The posh new grounds highlight some of the contrasts emerging across the predominantly Buddhist country. It's a place where ancient traditions meet a frenetic consumer culture stoked by one of Asia's fastest growing economies. The trendy cemetery's online service gives Vietnamese living elsewhere in the country or even overseas a way to participate in traditional rituals with a laptop and a MasterCard. This service is very convenient and cannot replace traditional worshipping, but it helps mourners from far away to feel comfortable.

Attitudes Toward Death and Dying

Attitudes toward end-of-life issues are diverse among different cultural backgrounds. Many Vietnamese people see death as a natural phase of the life cycle. This attitude toward death may be influenced by the fact that older adults are highly respected in Vietnamese culture. Further, Vietnamese people are influenced by spiritual beliefs linked not only to Catholicism or Buddhism, but also to Taoism and Confucianism. For example, reverence for ancestors and the use of home altars, where homage is paid to family ancestors, are common. These religious and societal norms influence Vietnamese views of death, allowing them to reframe the process and the event. For instance, concepts of reincarnation prevalent among Buddhists, ancestor worship, and the belief of going to heaven after death, may cause death to be viewed as something fortunate, and fitting with life's natural cycle. In addition, many Vietnamese people have lived through wars, witnessing deaths and suffering as results of such wars (Scherer et al. 2006). This fact, as well as historically higher

mortality rates among infants and adults in Vietnam, can make the Vietnamese view death more as a normal part of life with the exception of the death of infants.

Beliefs on Death and Dying

There are a number of cultural beliefs that are likely to affect decisions at the end of life for Vietnamese older adults and their families (Scherer et al. 2006). These include:

(1). an aversion to dying in the hospital because of the belief that souls of those who die outside the home wander with no place to rest;
(2). an avoidance of death and dying in the home for fear of opening up one's home to bad spirits;
(3). the perception that consenting to end-of-life support for a terminally ill parent contributes to her death is an insult to one's ancestors and parent;
(4). Buddhist beliefs in karma that interpret difficult deaths as punishment for bad deeds in former lives by the dying person or another family member.

Death is forever. Living is contemporary. This belief is influenced by Buddhism. Life after death depends on how people lead their lives now.

The Vietnamese strongly believe that a person should die at home and be surrounded by his family. It is a bad luck to carry a corpse home. Many people are carried to the hospital if they are sick. But if it becomes evident that they will die sooner or later, they are rushed home with all possible haste so that their demise may be made there.

On the Fear of Death and Dying

The fear of death and dying is very common. This can happen for several reasons, including one's age, religion, level of anxiety, or the experience of loss. For some people, their greatest fear is that when they die they will become nothing. Many of us believe that our entire existence is only a life span beginning the moment we are born and ending the moment we die. The Buddhist has a very different understanding of our existence. It is the understanding that birth and death are notions. They are not real. The fact that we think they are true makes a powerful illusion that causes our suffering. The Buddha taught that there is no birth, there is no death; there is no coming, there is no going; there is no same, there is no different; there is no permanent self, there is no annihilation. We only think there is. When we understand that we cannot be destroyed, we are liberated from fear (Hanh 2003). It is a great relief. We can enjoy life and appreciate it in a new way.

Vietnamese people think that anxiety is usually wrapped up in anticipation about how things will or won't go. It is an emotion that looks to the future. They keep

reminding themselves that fear of death is sometimes worse than death itself. T.N. Hanh (2003) wrote, "Your own life is composed of the same mechanisms and materials as other lives around you. Understanding this point can help you become more comfortable with the thought of a world without your particular self still being around".

Death Rituals

The carrying out of traditional death rituals is considered the most important act of filial piety among Vietnamese, from the rite of feeding the deceased to the rite of reburial, where bones of the deceased are collected, washed and preserved in a sacred jar for reburial. Ancestor worship is also important, and many Vietnamese people tend ancestral altars at home. Variations within the Vietnamese culture occur between regions, religious affiliations, or ethnic backgrounds. However, one common principle exists across subgroups: there is intensive and extensive family and community involvement throughout the whole process with the immediate family being gradually weaned off the support of family and friends over a period of 2–3 years.

> Pham Cong Son (1996), a Vietnamese anthropologist, said, "Death is not the end but is the final stage of one life to be transformed into another." He also asserted that death rituals provide the bereaved with a chance to fulfill their filial obligations to the deceased. Because death is usually unexpected, it often leaves family members and friends with unfinished business with the deceased. Since filial responsibilities are weighed heavily in the Vietnamese culture, and proper death rituals according to one's abilities are important, death rituals give the bereaved a final chance to make it right by the deceased and thus provide a sense of continuity as well as final closure (Dieu and Hoang 2000).

For Vietnamese, arranging a proper funeral for a loved one is one of the most important things a member of the family can do. In reality, a culturally proper funeral is more than an empty gesture to the dead; it helps the living to grieve and go on with life. Death rituals can also recreate social order by communicating, through the rules of who does what in the rituals, who is now to take the place of the deceased. Death rituals also serve as tools for humankind to transform death from a defeat of life to a stepping stone to another, perhaps better, place, and thus create a continuity beyond death itself. Finally, death rituals give the bereaved one last opportunity to make amends and say "I love you" and "goodbye forever".

The face of the dead person is covered with a white piece of paper or a handkerchief. In fact, this is a symbolic barrier between the dead person and the living one. It also helps to shield visitors from too great an emotional shock. Often, the deceased person's mouth is propped open so that visitors may drop in grains of rice and silver coins. The body is generally on a bed under a mosquito net. In some areas, a bunch of bananas are on the stomach of the dead person with the hope of distracting the devil from devouring the dead person's intestines. Sometimes a knife is placed on the stomach as a weapon against the devil. Family members wash the body with lotion and dress it in the best clothing. Nails are cut and the trimmings are placed in

small packages and attached to the proper hand and foot from which they were cut. Before the body is placed in the coffin, it is wrapped in strips of cloth and a white silk shroud. The body is wedged in the coffin with red branches, paper, and other objects. This helps keep the body in place as it decomposes. Many families place a bowl of uncooked rice on the lid of a coffin. They believe that this will keep the dead body from arising. The coffin should be attended constantly to keep any dog or cat from jumping over it, as it is believed that if this happens, the body will be revived temporarily and behave erratically, scaring those present.

Because embalming is not practiced in Vietnam, funerals normally take place shortly after death. There are exceptions, however, and on such occasions the body is placed in a casket and perfume is used to conceal odors of decay. Because of the heat and humidity, however, even this practice must be short-termed. For many villagers, the funeral may be quite simply the choosing of a burial spot, the digging of a shallow grave, the placing of the casket, and the closing of the grave. In such cases the casket may be attached to a bamboo pole and carried to the gravesite on the shoulders of two or four men. In most cases the grave is tended from time to time; the dirt is repiled and shaped to mark it as a grave and grass and weeds are removed.

Funeral processions are a common feature of Vietnamese funerals. In the typical procession, the eldest son of the deceased leads the march to the place of burial. He is followed by the clergy, relics of worship, and a picture of the deceased. If within the means of the family, a hired band is next in line, followed by the hearse. Female members of the family, dressed in white and wearing white headbands which signify mourning, follow the hearse on foot. Other mourners follow to complete the procession.

Funeral processions often feature four men carrying a shrine with a photograph of the deceased, people carrying flags and banners and offerings of fruit and burning incense, musicians with gongs and drums and family members wearing headbands. Votive papers are dropped along the way. Sometimes women carry a 30-foot long scroll that symbolically eases the passage of the dead to the afterlife. They also carry unlit torches that represent illumination for the journey. Six men roll an ornate hearse with a double roof turned up, pagoda-style, at the corners. A middle-aged man, apparently the deceased's eldest son, walks backward in front of it in filial deference. When the procession reaches the cemetery, incense sticks are lit, prayers are said and the family wails as the coffin is lowered into the ground.

> At the gravesite, another service is held. The coffin is lowered into the grave and buried. Emotions, which had calmed during the service, rise again. Here is yet another chance for mourners to say goodbye, and another outpouring of grief occurs. Most guests leave shortly after the burial to return to the deceased's home for the feast (Dieu and Hoang 2000).

> The closest friends and relatives remain with the family for a quiet time of prayer and contemplation. Just before leaving the gravesite, the family again becomes very emotional. Family members, cousins, and the older grandchildren sob bitterly and are reluctant to leave the gravesite. They all say goodbye for the last time. Before leaving the cemetery, they burn incense and pay their respects at the graves nearby. All family members, great-grandparents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins participate. As they go from grave to grave, they feel more at peace with the thought that the deceased will be in good company.

Sometimes, coffins are temporarily buried in the gardens to discourage thieves from robbing the valuables inside. In the case of young virgin girls, the burial place is often nearby the home so that it can be watched. Some rural people believe that the head of a virgin girl is very valuable and may be conserved and turned into the most powerful and omnipotent talisman through special ceremonies. Persons who have the talisman are believed to be omnipotent and invulnerable.

The family then gathers before the special altar which has been erected for the dead person and make offerings of food for the dead person's soul. This usually is three bowls of rice, three cups of tea, and a few other special dishes. In North Vietnam, it may be different–one bowl of rice, one cup of water, a boiled egg, and a bundle of joss-sticks planted in a bowl of uncooked rice and surrounded by lightened candles. This ceremony is supposed to be repeated three times a day during the entire mourning period, but in recent years, the time of this offering has been reduced to an acceptable 100 days.

The mourning period is 3 years for wives, children, daughters-in-law, and adopted children of the deceased man and only 1 year by husband's, sons-in-law, brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, and grandchildren of a woman. Nine months is the time of mourning for cousins on the father's side, and 5 months by cousins on the mother's side. While in mourning, Vietnamese do not usually visit temples and pagodas, festivals, parties, and other entertainments. They also normally delay marriages and do not wear bright coloured clothing. A black band is worn on the arm by men in mourning and a small black piece of material is worn on the dress of women mourners after the funeral for the entire mourning period.

Conclusion

While there are differences of opinion, it seems that death among the ethnic Vietnamese is believed to be part of the return to eternity. A reincarnation in some form will be decided by the sum and value of the life of the deceased as well as by the prayers said to one's spirit. On death anniversary celebrations, the first day of the year, lunar festival holidays, Tet holidays, and all important family events such as births and marriages, worship at family ancestor altars is performed. The beliefs, fears and rituals of people in the north of Vietnam are quite similar to people in other parts of the country. The effect of belief on ritual is partially mediated by fear.

References

Dieu Hien, T., & Hoang, R. N. (2000). *Death rituals in Vietnamese society*. Seattle: University of Washington.

Gruenewald, D. A., & White, E. J. (2006). The illness experience of older adults near the end of life: A systematic review. *Anesthesiology Clinics, 24*, 16380.

Hanh, T. N. (2003). *No death, no fear: Comforting wisdom for life (Reissue edition)*. New York: Riverhead.

Owens, C. O., & Lundgren, K. (2002). *Medical examiner dialogue Vietnamese Buddhist*. Seattle: University of Washington.

Rao, J. K., Anderson, L. A., & Smith, S. M. (2002). End of life is a public health issue. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 23*(3), 21520.

Scherer, Y., Jezewski, M. A., Graves, B., Wu, Y. W. B., & Bu, X. (2006). Advance directives and end-of-life decision making survey of critical care nurses knowledge, attitude, and experience. *Critical Care Nurse, 26*(4), 30–40.

Vietnamese Cultural Profile. (2009). *Diversicare*, PO Box 5199.

Wright, A. A., et al. (2008). Associations between end-of-life discussions, patient mental health, medical care near death, and caregiver bereavement adjustment. *JAMA, 300*(14), 166573.

Negotiating Traditions and Modernity: Chinese Death Rituals in Singapore

Chee-Kiong Tong

Abstract For a people that purportedly values longevity, the Chinese are preoccupied with death, preparing for it long before its imminence. This paper, using a cultural analysis of funerary rituals, examines the meanings and significance of death for the Chinese, beginning with the preparations for death, followed by the funeral and the burial, and one's ascension as an ancestor. Viewing rituals as heightened activities which conflate, refract and highlight the most important values for the Chinese, it will be shown that there is an underlying logic to these rituals. Singapore provides an excellent case study for traditional rituals in an urban context. Singapore society has undergone a rapid process of modernization and industrialization which has vastly changed the physical and cultural milieu of the Chinese. This paper explores the changes and adaptation of traditional rituals in an urbanized context and the continuing negotiations between tradition and modernity in ritual performance.

Keywords Chinese · Death · Funerals · Singapore · Rituals

Introduction

Many Chinese in Singapore prepare for death long before its imminence, spending vast amounts of money to ensure the proper disposal of the dead. What is the rationale for this preoccupation with death? Why must death rituals be as elaborate and ostentatious as possible? What does death signify for the Chinese? This paper addresses these and other questions regarding death rituals among the Chinese in Singapore. It will carry out a cultural analysis of Chinese funerary behavior, looking into the belief system to uncover meaning systems informing Chinese death rituals, examining its organizational features and its linkage with larger socio-cultural value of the ritual participants, especially its linkage to the kinship and economic networks and the relationship between ritual and society.

C.-K. Tong (✉)
Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Gadong, Brunei
e-mail: cheekytong@gmail.com

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_6

While there have been many studies on Chinese death rituals, particularly in China and Taiwan, the bulk of the research was conducted among rural or agrarian communities. The critical question is whether the rituals have changed in an urban context. Are the performance of traditional rituals similar or different to that performed in villages? If yes, how and why? Singapore provides an excellent case study of the transformation in traditional Chinese death ritual performance. Singapore is a small island state of about 720 km^2 situated at the tip of the Malayan Peninsula. Three features make Singapore an interesting case study. First, it has a majority Chinese population, constituting 76% of the population, largely descended from Chinese migrants who came in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They brought most of their cultural and religious practices to the new homeland. Second, Singapore is a multi-religious society; in 2010, 44.2% of the population were Chinese religionists (33.2% Buddhists, 11% Taoists), 18.8% Christians, 14% Muslims, 5% practitioners of Hinduism, and 18.3% profess to have no religion. Third, Singapore society has undergone rapid modernization and industrialization. The GDP per capita rose from US$ 516 in 1965 to US$ 55,235 in 2018. This rapid economic growth and attendant social change will have an impact on traditional rituals and religious behavior. This must have affected and resulted in changes and adaptations in the performance of traditional Chinese death rituals. The chapter will document these changes and adaptations but also consider the evidence that despite these changes death rituals are still prevalent and their performance seen as a necessity. It will describe the processes by which the ritual participants negotiate the context, conflicts and contradictions of performing traditional rituals in a modern society.

Chinese Death Rituals

Preparation for Death

One of the more interesting features of Chinese death rituals is that they prepare for death long before a person is on the deathbed. It is not unusual for informants to subscribe to mutual aid or clan associations to ensure that there will be sufficient funds for the funerary rituals. Others go to the extent of purchasing coffins long before death is due. Many Chinese will reserve a burial plot or a space in the clan ancestral halls or in temple halls to accommodate their ancestral tablets. Popular reasons cited for these practices include ensuring that there is money to conduct the rituals, ensuring that there will be a large turnout during the rituals, the desire to choose propitious burial plots and temple spaces, choosing sites with good *fengshui*, and to ensure that that the person will have a comfortable life in the Afterworld. Families will spend an astronomical sum of money to ensure the performance of rituals. Even less affluent families desire and attempt to make the rituals as elaborate as possible, often incurring debts in the process. A simple funeral often evokes

comments that the deceased had not led a "good life". This chapter will describe the most common and often practiced rituals associated with death. There are however many variations in the performance of the rituals and these will be highlighted in the chapter (see Ward 1965; Smith 1974; Watson 1988; DeGlopper 1974).

Once a person is near death, all family members—sons, grandsons, daughters, daughters-in-laws—are summoned and gather in his home to await his death.[1] It is considered an unfilial act not to be at the deathbed of one's parent. However, menstruating women are not allowed near the dying for fear of polluting him. Similarly, pregnant women are not allowed near the dying because of the belief that spirits lurking around the dying might enter the embryo and affect the child.

To prepare for death, the living room is cleared of all furniture and household items are removed. Household items and anything that had come into contact with the deceased is thought to be polluted and would be deposed of by burning. The "god altar" in the house and the ancestral tablets are draped with a piece of red cloth. The gods and ancestors cannot come into contact with the dead because he is considered to be dirty and dangerous and they would be insulted if exposed to this. Death is viewed as polluting and measures must be taken to protect the living from its influence. Watson (1982, p. 156), conducting fieldwork in Hong Kong, suggests that death releases a *sat hei*, literally a "killing air" that can affect people who are near the dead.

Washing and Dressing the Dead

At the moment of death, the family burst into loud wailing. Sons implore the father's soul not to leave and to come back into the body. After an appropriate interval, sons carry the body of the deceased and lay it on a previously prepared spot in the center of the living room. A red blanket is placed over the body, completely covering it. The blanket is called the *fen bu*, the division. The blanket signifies the division between heaven and earth; at the moment the deceased is still on earth as he has not yet been properly prepared for the journey to heaven.

At the same time, another piece of red cloth is hung over the front door. The cloth serves several functions; it prevents malicious spirits from entering the house, attracted by the death of a person, it prevents the soul of the deceased from wandering out of the house, and it protects innocent bystanders from harm. Finally, it informs the community that a death has occurred in the family and they should take appropriate measures to avoid contact with death.

The body is then prepared for the washing and dressing rituals. A single lighted joss-stick in a red urn and three food items are placed near the head of the deceased. Traditionally, the water for washing the dead must be purchased from the gods. Sons and grandsons would leave the house in a body and walk silently to the nearest

[1] In this paper, the masculine gender is used. Words importing the masculine gender shall also include the feminine gender.

well, stream or river, with the eldest son carrying a bucket. After filling the bucket with water, a few copper coins will be thrown into the water to pay its guardian spirit (Comber 1954). Nowadays it is more common for tap water to be used. This does not change the content of the ritual. Water from the home of the deceased cannot be used for the washing ritual as death causes everything in the home to be dirty, including the water (Granet 1975).

In some cases, the water is scented with pomegranate flowers to increase its cleansing potency. This water is called *tian shui* or "heavenly water". The eldest son performs the actual ritual of washing the dead. The symbolism of water and washing is very prevalent throughout the funerary ritual process and performance. The very act of dying makes the deceased a "dirty" person and he must be cleansed, as a person with an unclean body will be despised and punished in hell. The washing of the dead ritual purifies the dead to prepare him for the journey to heaven. Informants conceive of "dirt" both in its literal sense as well as a symbolic sense of dirt as pollution.

In present day Singapore, it is increasingly more common for families to engage the services of a religious specialist to aid in the enactment of the rituals. This is now necessary as family members have very little knowledge of ritual procedures. In addition, there is a fear that if the rituals are not performed correctly, it will have negative consequences for the deceased. The actual rituals however, must be carried out by the sons.

After the ritual bath, the deceased is dressed in many layers of clothing. Traditionally, the dead was dressed in full regalia. Comber (1954, p. 13) mentions that sometimes as many as 20 layers of robes were made. In general, at least seven to nine layers of clothing were needed, to "ensure that the deceased will have sufficient clothing in the afterlife". There are dialect variations. For example, among the Hainanese, the deceased will be clothed with three shirts and four pairs of trousers. The clothes are lavish and elaborate, to give the impression that the deceased was an important person in this world and will be accorded good treatment in his passage through hell. The clothes are known as *shou yi* or "generational clothes". Each layer represents a generation of the deceased and the more layers, the greater the number of descendants and the greater the indication that he has led a good life (see Hsu 1949, p. 47, Yang 1961). Pearls are placed in the mouth and hands of the deceased. They are said to have preservative qualities. Some suggest that they can be used to bribe the "judges" of hell.

The family now performs the *ru mu*, literally entering the wood, ritual. The body of the deceased is placed in the coffin by the sons. The coffin is made as comfortable as possible for the deceased. Personal articles of the deceased: toothbrushes, comb, spectacles, favorite pillow are placed in the coffin, in the belief that the dead will continue to use them in the afterlife. In addition, a mirror, to light the way for the dead, and a bag of grain, to ensure that the deceased will have enough to eat, are also placed in the coffin. A large amount of joss paper and paper money are also included for the deceased's use in the Otherworld. Precautions are taken to prevent the entry of foreign objects in the coffin, such as metallic or sharp objects that can hurt the

deceased and insects that can destroy the body. The sense here is that the deceased, in the afterworld, continues to have the same needs, and desires, as in this world.

After the body of the deceased is properly arranged in the coffin, the sons, led by the eldest, take a spoonful of rice and symbolically feed the deceased. This feeding of the dead is important as a person will supposedly become a "hungry ghost" if he is not fed. The family gather around the coffin for one last moment with the deceased. *Hao hua*, literally good words, are whispered into the ears of the deceased to comfort his soul. The coffin is then nailed shut, a nail in each corner. After the four nails have been hammered in, a fifth nail, called the *zi sun ding*, or "posterity nail" is placed at the center of the coffin by the eldest son. The Chinese word for nail is a homonym for descendants. It signifies that although the person is dead, he will have generations of descendants who will worship him. Small pieces of paper are stuck to the seams of the coffin for "warding off evil spirits that might try to enter" (see DeGroot 1892–1910; Ahern 1973).

The coffin is then carried out of the home and placed under a canopy, a huge rectangular structure made of wood and canvas constructed near the home of the deceased and the site where the funerary rituals will be conducted. Traditionally, the coffin would be kept in the main room of the home or in an ancestral hall. In Singapore however, with urban renewal and a high population density, most homes are too small to conduct the rituals. In a sense, the funeral, which is a private ritual of the family has become a ritual in the public domain. It has resulted in the creation of new rituals in order to protect the public from the dead. For example, small pieces of red paper are placed at strategic locations along the route from the home of the deceased to the funeral site. These are meant to protect people who inadvertently come into contact with the deceased. People who live near the site of the funeral will take a variety of precautions to avoid coming into contact with death, including long detours. Families who live near the funeral site will place red charms on their doors to ensure that the spirit will not enter their homes.

Ritual Paraphernalia at the Funeral

At the north end of the canopy, the coffin is placed in a horizontal position between two tripods. An urn, known as the *yao hu*, literally a pot for boiling herbs, and covered with a bamboo fan, is placed under the coffin. Set beside the coffin is an elaborate paper lantern. Known as the *zi sun deng*, literally, "posterity lantern", it will be carried by the eldest son during the funerary rituals. In front of the coffin is a chair with the character *hun* or "soul" written on it and draped with the clothes and shoes of the deceased. A large picture of the deceased, known as the longevity portrait, is set on the chair. Beside the chairs are a wash basin filled with a cup, toothbrush, toothpaste and a towel, objects which the deceased will use as if he is a living person (see Fig. 1). The chair is not merely a symbolic representation; the deceased is thought to be present and sitting on the chair.

Fig. 1 Longevity portrait

Flanking the longevity portrait are two figurines. These are servants who will accompany the deceased on his journey, in order to ensure that the father will have a comfortable life. Like the offering of food and money, there is a conception of the afterlife as homologous to this world, where the dead have the same needs and desires. Moreover, there is a conscious effort to elevate the status of the deceased in the afterlife. An altar with two candles and a red joss urn is placed in front of the coffin. The candles and the joss-sticks must be lit at all times. On the side of the altar is a *chang ming deng*, or longevity lamp. It represents the continuous worship of the deceased. Placed on the altar are a variety of food offerings, including plates of fruits, bowls of rice, and cups of tea.

The back portion of the coffin is hidden from view by a screen. The top of the screen is often inscribed with laudatory words, such as *zhong xiao chuan jia*, "loyalty, filiality and the continuation of the family name,", *jin xiao da li*, "fulfil filial piety, know the rites", and *yin rong wan zai*, "your voice and appearance are with us". Some screens also depict the twenty-four acts of supreme filial piety found in traditional Chinese classics. A straw mat is placed beside the coffin and also a container for burning joss paper. Banners and wreaths sent by friends are hung around the funeral site; the number received is taken as an indication of the social status of the deceased and his descendants. Under the canopy are many tables and chairs with

Fig. 2 Altar to the deceased

plates of tidbits for the guests' consumption. At the side of the canopy is placed a table where the treasurer collects the contributions for the funeral (see Fig. 2).

Daily Rituals at the Funeral

Funerals in Singapore normally last from 3 to 7 days, the number of days being always in odd numbers. Odd numbers denote incompleteness, and symbolize a continuation of the existence of the deceased. Food offerings are made to the deceased in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. At these times, the eldest son, with a lighted joss-stick in his hands, will bow three times and ask his deceased father to eat the daily meals. The idea of the living presence of the deceased can be observed in the ritual of placing his favorite food on the altar. In one case, a daughter of the deceased placed a lighted cigarette in the joss urn. "My father always smoked a cigarette after his meals".

Beside the coffin, family members, usually females, burn joss paper as a sacrifice to the deceased. This must be done slowly to ensure that the deceased gets all the money that is due to him. Unburned or partially burned joss paper cannot be used by the dead. Moreover, this ritual must be performed continuously, to assure the deceased that he is being cared for by his filial descendants. The *bu yao* or "feeding the herbs" ritual is also carried out daily. Each morning, the eldest son or eldest daughter-in-law kneels beside the coffin. Using a bamboo fan, he fans the *yao hu* and ritually repeats the words, "When I was young, you took care of me. When I

was sick, you fed me medicine. Now that you are sick, I will take care of you, prepare herbs to feed you so that you will get well soon".

Toward evening, a large number of friends of the family attend the funeral. On arrival, they bow or kneel before the altar. With a single lighted joss-stick in hand, they perform the ritual *bai,* prostrating themselves or bowing three times to the deceased. A few family members will kneel beside the coffin and accompany the visitors in the ritual *bai*. A visitor will be very insulted if there is no one to accompany him because this indicates a loss of face. After this, they settle down and chat with one another. Family members make it a point to go round to exchange words with the visitors. Visitors will invariably make a trip to the treasurer's table to give a small contribution toward meeting the cost of the funeral. This must be done discreetly, however, and the money must be hidden from public view.

Very few young children except family members are found at the site of the funeral. Young children are more vulnerable to attacks by evil spirits and their presence at the funeral is not encouraged. Pregnant women and newlywed couples are also not allowed to attend. There are two reasons for these taboos. First, since funerals are associated with death, the vicinity of the funeral is potentially dangerous to all the living. Precautions must be taken to protect them from harm by the deceased, who during this transitory period between being a dead person and an ancestor is not easily controllable. Second, it is said that many evil spirits are attracted to the area surrounding the funeral. These uninvited spirits also pose a danger to the living, particularly to weaker women and children. Thus, each visitor is given a piece of red thread to protect against evil influences and to ensure that the visitor will have a safe journey home. Visitors are never seen off. They leave quietly, without saying goodbye to the deceased's family. Words like "please come again" are never used because they can be taken to mean to invite death again. Visitors must wash their faces and take a bath with pomegranate water upon reaching home to ensure eradication of the contamination of death, or the fear of having taken on the "dirt" of death by virtue of being near the dead.

An overnight vigil is kept at the funeral for fear that something unnatural could happen to the corpse if the coffin is left unattended. If a black cat jumped over the coffin, the corpse of the deceased will be reanimated and become a walking zombie. Another reason cited for keeping the overnight vigil is to accompany the deceased and protect him from evil influences.

Throughout the funeral, the family members wear very simple mourning clothes, consisting of a black or white blouse and trousers. No colors such as red or yellow are permitted. On the final night of the funeral, however, the family of the deceased puts on very elaborate mourning clothes. Five grades of mourning garments are found. The first order mourners; sons, eldest grandson, daughters, and daughters-in-law, wear the coarsest clothes, consisting of white shirts and trousers, straw overcoats, hats and slippers (see Fig. 3). The second order mourners, the deceased's sons-in-law, wear white mourning clothes without the coarse overalls. The third order mourners, brothers and sisters of the deceased, wear black mourning clothes. The daughter's children are the fourth order mourners. They wear blue mourning garments, with blue caps (for the males) and shrouds (for the females) and blue

Fig. 3 Mourning garments

sashes. The sash in all funeral garments must not be tied in a knot, but just tucked into the garment. A tied garment will cause the deceased to be trapped, and be unable to complete his journey. The fifth order mourners, the great grandchildren, wear green mourning clothes, with green caps and sashes. Mourning pins or *xiao bu* are worn from the first day of the funeral. These are small pieces of cloth, about one and a half inches by one inch, and are pinned on the shirtsleeves. The grades of *xiao bu* generally correspond with the order of the mourning garments.

The Final Night Rituals

The final night of the funeral holds the greatest ritual significance. An elaborate altar is constructed at the south end of the canopy. This is called the *shen zuo* or "altar to the gods". Behind the *shen zuo* are pictures of several gods, including the *sanqing*, regarded as the paramount deities in the Taoist pantheon. Beside the altar are two lanterns, with the age of the deceased inscribed on each. The lanterns do not reflect the true age of the deceased. Several years are normally added. The practice

demonstrates a regard for longevity, to show that the deceased has lived a long and prosperous life.

The funeral service normally begins in the evening. It starts with the *qi tan*, the commencement of rites. A group of musicians strike their gongs, accompanied by loud music, to signify the start of the rituals. Family members, particularly the women, begin to wail, some uncontrollably. The Chief priest summons family members to kneel before the *shen zuo*, staggered according to the generational hierarchy. Three priests, dressed in white robes, stand at the *shen zuo* and begin to chant, informing the deities of the rituals being carried out for the deceased. Seventy-two documents are issued, thirty-six yellow documents to inform the deities in heaven, and thirty-six white documents to the deities in Hell. While chanting, the priest holds a tablet in his hand. This is known as the *tian huang hao ling*, literally, "by the authority of the heavenly emperor". After about half an hour of chanting, the chief priest takes a papier-mâché donkey and sets it on fire. Pasted on the back of the donkey is a piece of red paper, inscribed with the name of the deceased, his birthdate and death date. According to the priest, the donkey is being sent to heaven to inform the gods that funeral rituals are being conducted for the deceased. The priests proceed with their chanting. Half an hour later, a pair of *feng huang*, phoenix, are burned. These birds are sent to heaven to invite the gods to descend to earth and attend the funeral rituals. Two more pairs of phoenix are burned to ensure that all the gods have been invited and that no god has been slighted.

Having invited the deities to attend the funeral, the next set of rituals are the *qing guan*, clearing the coffin, and the *rao guan*, encircling the coffin. The priest takes a piece of yellow joss paper and begins to chant the *chu xiao qing guan ci liang jin ke*, or the "golden verses for clearing the coffin" scripture. Then, holding the joss paper over the coffin, he burns it. From an urn filled with pomegranate scented water, he takes a sprig of leaves and splashes the liquid over the coffin. This is meant to clear the coffin of any evil influences that may be lurking around. After completing this, he commands the assembled family members to stand in a single file. Chanting scriptures, he leads the procession, walking three times around the coffin. If the deceased is male, the procession will walk in an anti-clockwise direction. If the deceased is female, the *rao guan* is conducted in a clockwise direction. It is meant to inform the deceased of the family members present at the funeral and to pay their respect to the dead.

After about half an hour, the family members again assemble in a line before the altar to the deceased. The line is staggered according to the order of relationship to the deceased, with the eldest son first, followed by the other sons, grandsons, daughters-in-law, daughters, and so on. The eldest son carries a red joss urn with a single lighted joss-stick. Over his shoulder, the eldest son also carries the *zhi deng long*, which is to light the way for the deceased. Each family member also carries a joss-stick. Led by the chief priest, the procession walks around the canopy seven times. This ritual is known as the *wang xi fang*, walking in the westerly direction, to accompany and aid the soul of the deceased in his journey to bliss, located in *xi tian,* Western Heaven. The term *wang xi fang* is Buddhist. For Taoist priests who perform the same ritual, it is known as *wang chang le jie*, return to the world of every happi-

ness. However, the aim of the ritual is similar, to assist the dead in his reincarnation and alleviate the sorrows he had in the past life.

After this ritual is completed, the family settles down before the *shen zuo* while the priests chant more prayers for another half hour. The family then reassembles to perform the "crossing of the bridges" ritual. A wooden bridge is placed at the center of the canopy. This is the *nai he qiao*, the bridge of no return, or the bridge of sighs (see Fig. 4). The priest leads the procession over the bridge. Thirteen crossings are made, signifying the thirteen bridges that lead to the Gates of Hell. At each crossing, coins meant to appease dangerous spirits present on the deceased's hazardous journey of the deceased to Hell are thrown into a bowl placed under the bridge. On the thirteenth crossing, the soul is said to be about to enter into Hell. At this juncture, family members break into loud wailing. They bid a final farewell to the deceased, wishing him a smooth journey. After the crossings have been completed, the family kneels before the altar while the priests continue to chant more prayers. This is considered to be a very dangerous period because it is said that the soul of the deceased is now making his way through the Ten Courts of Hell, or more precisely, ten *di yu*, earthly prisons (see Maspero 1981; Xu 1998).

In each court, the deceased stands before a presiding magistrate who tries him, based on his actions and deeds on earth. There are sets of mandatory punishments for specific crimes and wrongdoing. For example, in the second court, ignorant doctors who mutilate people are sliced up like butchered animals. In the third court, dishonest mandarins, forgers, slanderers, and those who sell the family burial grounds, are punished by having their knees pulverized, their hearts and eyes torn out and their feet and hands cut off.

The miserly rich, swindlers, and dishonest merchants are kept in the fourth court. Here, they are forced to remain seated on a bed of nails and then crushed under

Fig. 4 *Neiheqiao* ritual

wooden beams. Murderers, rapists, and prostitutes are punished by having their chests opened; their hearts plucked out and fed to animals. Sacrilegious persons are crushed by rollers or flayed alive and stuffed. Unfilial sons have their tongues cut out and nails driven into their head. Finally, the deceased reaches the Tenth Court of Hell, or the Court of Reincarnation. Here, the judge decides, based on a person's deeds on earth, whether he should be reborn as an animal or man, and also what his new status in life will be.

At this juncture of the funeral, an elaborately decorated pagoda known as the *zhuan lun*, wheel of reincarnation, is hung from the roof of the canopy (see Fig. 5). With the family of the deceased kneeling before the pagoda, the priest reads a report (to the gods) about the deceased: his name, address, age, and sex, number of wives and children, and occupation. After reading the report, he twirls the pagoda, and it spins round and round. As it spins, the priest continues to chant prayers. The point where the pagoda comes to a stop, according to the priest, is the person or animal into which the deceased will be reincarnated. Although it is accepted that there is always the possibility that the deceased may not complete the journey through Hell, the thought that one's own parents are stranded in Hell is never entertained. Other people's dead may get trapped in Hell; one's own never does. The performance of the *zhuan lun* rituals attest to the idea that the deceased has been given a rebirth. The

Fig. 5 Reincarnation ritual

Chinese idea of rebirth is an integration of Buddhist, Taoists and syncretic beliefs (Welch 1967, pp. 181–205; Zhang 1995). This certainty that one's parents are reincarnated is due to the conviction that the very enactment of the death rituals is a means to ensure that one's parents will have a smooth journey through Hell. One informant said, "This is why we give so much money to the deceased. He can use them to bribe the judges of Hell."

A large number of paper goods is then sacrificed to the deceased. Everything that the deceased could possibly need will be burned as a sacrifice, toothbrushes, shoes, clothes, blankets, and a large quantity of paper money. To prevent wandering spirits from stealing the sacrifices meant for the deceased, family members kneel in a circle around the fire and strike the ground with bamboo sticks, making a loud noise. Rice wine is also poured around the fire, demarcating the area for the ancestral spirit to collect the offerings meant for him. It is the duty of the descendants to ensure that the deceased is adequately and even luxuriously provided for in the Otherworld to ensure his happiness, and this in turn, brings blessings to the family. The final night rituals come to an end. The family settles down for the final overnight vigil and prepares for the deceased's burial.

Burial and Cremation

Early the next morning, a religious specialist arrives to perform the burial rituals. This specialist usually is not a Taoist or Buddhist priest but a layman regarded as knowledgeable in burial affairs. Again, an elaborate offering is placed on the altar, consisting of a pig, chicken, duck, various sweet cakes and fruits, bowls of rice, and cups of wine. The eldest son kneels before the altar and offers each dish to the deceased. After a suitable interval, when it is perceived that the deceased has eaten enough, the whole family kneels beside the altar while the visitors pay their last respects to the deceased.

Six volunteers then carry the coffin and place it on the *ling che*, an elaborately decorated lorry (see Fig. 6). At this point, the family breaks into loud wailing. The coffin cannot be touched by anyone but the family members. Persons who inadvertently touch the coffin will be struck with ill fortune and even death. Volunteers who carry the coffin do so with pieces of red paper in their hands.

The funeral procession is headed by one or more bands of musicians, dressed in military style uniforms and playing discordant music. The noise is meant to frighten away any malicious spirits lurking around the funeral site. At the same time, it gives the funeral an air of festivity, or *re nao*. Behind the musicians are a number of people carrying blue banners inscribed with names of people who have given contributions toward the funeral. These banners are called *ming xing* and are meant to open the path for the spirit of the deceased. Other banners are inscribed with the names of the various clan organizations. The cortege then forms behind the lorry, with the sons and daughters in the first row, followed by other family members. Two long ropes are attached to the front of the lorry and friends of the deceased pull the

Fig. 6 The *Lingche*

cortege along. The eldest son kneels beside the road and bids farewell to the deceased. Although death is inevitable, family members must not be seen to lead the deceased to the grave. That is why only friends are allowed to load the coffin into the lorry and lead the cortege to the graveyard, with the family following behind, pulling at the cortege as if to prevent the cortege from leaving.

On arrival at the graveyard, the coffin is lowered into the ground. This too is done by friends or professional helpers. The coffin must be perfectly aligned with the gravestone because failure to do so will result in the inability of the soul of the deceased to receive the offerings made to him. Others engage a *fengshui* expert, or geomancer, to ensure that this is done correctly. After this is satisfactorily completed, a temporary altar is set up before the coffin. Here are placed a picture of the deceased, two lighted candles, a pair of joss-sticks, and a simple food offering.

Finally, the ritual specialist throws a white cockerel across the grave in the direction of the chief mourner, who catches it. This act ensures the perpetuation of descendants of the deceased. It can be taken to mean the final passing of the rights of the deceased to his descendants. The family watches as professional gravediggers fill up the hole. The eldest son carries the picture of the deceased and the joss urn. These will be placed on the family ancestral altar at home. From this moment on, the deceased is believed to be an ancestor and no longer a dead person, and the worship of the ancestor begins.

In recent years, because of the land shortage in Singapore, the government has advocated cremation as a means of disposal of the dead in preference to graveyard burials. Priority is given to the use of land for urban development and housing, and this has led to a sharp decrease in the land available for graveyards. Burial plots are very expensive, and their acquisition involves a tedious process to obtain special permits from the authorities. As a result, cremation is often chosen as an alternative to burial. The idea of cremation is not alien to Chinese burial practices. In fact, as

the influence of Buddhism became more pronounced in China, the cremation of the dead became popular during the Yuan and the Song dynasties. Except for the process of burning instead of burying, the rituals are similar. On arrival at the crematorium, the coffin is set on a tripod before an altar. Most crematoria in Singapore are run by Buddhist temples. Buddhist monks chant prayers for the dead and then lead the family round the coffin three times, after which the coffin is pushed into an enclosed propane burner. On the following day, the family members return to the crematorium to collect the bones of the deceased. The bones and ashes are spread on a tray, and using chopsticks, family members carefully pick up the small pieces of bones and place them in a joss urn. With the priest leading the family, the urn is carried and placed in a columbarium. Thus ends the performance of the funerary rituals and the beginning of the worship of the dead as an ancestor.

Whither Chinese Death Rituals?

One of the questions raised at the beginning of this paper is the effect of rapid modernization and social change on traditional ritual behavior. Are traditional religious complexes immune or susceptible to developments in other areas of society? For example, there has been a notable shift in the configuration of religious affiliation in Singapore. In the 1931 Census, over 97% of the Chinese in Singapore claim to practice Chinese religion. In 1980, however, only 72.5% said they were "Chinese religionists" (38.2% Taoists and 34.3% Buddhists). Meanwhile, 10.6% claim they were Christians and 16.7% denied believing in any religion. The 2000 Census showed other significant changes. The number of adherents to Buddhism had increased dramatically to 42.5%. This increase was at the expense of Taoism, which declined to 8.5%. There has been a moderate increase in the number of Christians (14.6%), while those who claim to have no religion remained relatively stable (14.8%). Do these changes in the patterns of religious affiliations have an impact on the practice of traditional Chinese religion, including death rituals? Since Chinese religion relies heavily on oral transmission for the handing down of ritual practices from one generation to another, will this result in a marked decrease in ritual enactment? Those who claimed not to practice Chinese religion were, by and large, English-educated with tertiary qualifications. What is the correlation between socio-economic status and belief in traditional religion?

I conducted a national survey to study the practice of traditional Chinese religion in Singapore, with the aims of analyzing the trends and variations in Chinese ritual practices as well as examining the impact of rapid social change and modernization. 1025 respondents were interviewed to find out about their religious practices at home, at public places of worship, Chinese festivals, and birth, marriage and death rituals.

A major finding is that the adherence to Chinese religious practices, despite the rapid modernization of Singapore society, remains very high. For example, in terms of home-based rituals, the survey indicates that the majority of respondents still carry out worship activities such as using joss-sticks and offering food and fruits to

the ancestors. The ritual of praying to ancestors with joss-sticks is performed by over 90% of the respondents. Similarly, 98.9% of respondents celebrate the Chinese New Year, as well as activities associated with it, such as the giving of red packets, having a reunion dinner, and visiting relatives. The survey found that the degree of adherence to Chinese funerary rituals is quite high. Rituals such as the giving of *baijin*, watching over the dead, wearing of mourning garments, and washing and dressing the dead, register very high adherence rate of between 84% and 94% of all Chinese Singaporeans. Other rituals, such as buying of water to clean the deceased, and feeding the dead, register about 78% adherence. Thus, death rituals continue to be widely practiced among the Chinese, especially rituals that have to do with the treatment of the dead corpse, and those with an element of public demonstration (mourning garments, wreaths, and giving of *baijin*). Morality, performativity and property, clearly, continue to be significant motivational factors.

This high rate of adherence indicates that death rituals continue to hold a very significant place in the lives of Chinese Singaporeans, despite the advent of modernization. However, a deeper analysis of the data suggests some interesting trends. Younger Singaporeans are generally less likely to observe traditional Chinese customs and rites. In the celebration of the *Qing Ming* (Tomb Sweeping Day) festival, for instance, a much higher percentage of those in the older age groups (87.6% for those from 50 to 59 years old, and 86.6% for those 40 to 49 years old) celebrate Qing Ming, compared to the younger Singaporeans (72.7%). While this may imply that there may be a drop in the number of Chinese performing the rituals associated with death, it should be emphasized that even for the young, the rate of adherence is still relatively high, in the 70% to 75% range. This is still a substantial proportion of the Chinese population in Singapore and indicates that death rituals are, and will continue to be carried out, by a sizeable proportion of the Chinese population in modern Singapore.

One reason for the lower rate of adherence among younger Singaporeans is that this age group has a relatively higher number of Christians. For example, in 1990, 16.2% of the Chinese population aged 20–29 professes to be Christians, compared to 11.8% for those aged 60 and above. Many Christians do not observe traditional Chinese rituals because they feel that these practices are contrary to their beliefs. However, I found that most Christians do participate in the funerary rituals of their parents. Some do not carry out all the rituals. For example, some will wear the mourning garments and take part in the *nai he qiao* ritual but will not carry joss-sticks. Others will perform the Qing Ming rituals, but offer flowers instead of food.

While there was a period of substantial increase in the number of Chinese Christians in Singapore in the 1960s and 1970s, the rate of growth has declined. Instead, over the last 20 years, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of Chinese professing to be Buddhists. In 1980, 27% of the population claim to be Buddhists. In 2000, over 42% profess Buddhism. This growth has been at the expense of Taoism which declined from 30% in 1980 to just 8.5% in 2000. The survey found that the practice of Chinese rituals in this group remains essentially high. For example, only 8.6% of the respondents reveal that they do not have a family altar at home, reflecting the persistence of Chinese religious worship. The

importance of the family and ancestors for the Chinese is manifested by the high rate of observance for the *Qing Ming Jie* (81.3%), with the majority (82.3%) of the practitioners visiting the graveyard on this occasion. It would be difficult to argue that there has been a serious erosion of traditional religious practices among the Chinese in Singapore. This is not to say that there have been no changes in the performance of traditional Chinese death rituals. All religions are dynamic, constantly being interpreted and mediated by their followers.

The structural and social transformations in Singapore society have resulted in many adaptations in ritual practices, such as the use of substitution ancestral tablets, *the li dai zhu xian* ancestral tablets, and the trend towards more family centered rituals. Many rituals have also undergone a degree of modification to make them more applicable to life in a modern society. For example, in traditional China, the mourning period for the death of a father can extend up to 3 years. In Singapore, it is more common for the mourning period to be for 49 or 100 days. Similarly, the interval between coffining and burial, traditionally, can be prolonged to anything from 3 months to a year. In modern Singapore, given the exigencies of modern living, they usually last from 3 to 7 days. While the forms may have changed, the rationales behind the performance of these rituals have not.

There have also been changes in attitudes toward religious matters. For example, the construction of high-rise housing units in Singapore has sometimes required the mass exhumation of traditional graveyards. Initially, there was a reluctance to live in these dwellings as they are associated with death. But the scarcity of urban dwelling has in many instances led Chinese to accept such housing. However, many informants rationalize that religious specialists have been engaged to ameliorate the pollution of the site.

Part of the explanation for these changes may be due to the immigrant nature of the Chinese population in Singapore. Being away from China, people set about adapting, modifying and creating rituals to deal with living in a new and alien environment. Moreover, because of the rapidly modernizing nature of Singapore society, the performance of death rituals has undergone modification and adaptation. In a sense, these modifications and adaptations reflect the evolving structure of Singapore society. Modernity requires that religious practices undergo modifications in order that the traditional symbolic meanings are still upheld. However, the conditions of modernity have not simply led to the demise of traditional religious practices. Rather, through the invention and reinvention of rituals, death rituals continue to provide a meaning system for the Chinese religionists in Singapore. Part of the reason for this ease of change is the nature of Chinese death rituals. The malleability of practices is possible because the rituals are not text based, nor anchored in canonical rules and teachings. In its reliance on an oral tradition, changes are more easily introduced, accommodated, and explained. As I have highlighted earlier, this is a religion that is highly pragmatic, problem-oriented, result-oriented, and this-worldly rather than philosophical. As a result, when conditions of modernity suggest it is impractical to perform rituals in a certain way, these rituals are modified and reconceptualised. Death rituals avail themselves to manipulation with no major dissonance.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the re(invented) rituals must be sanctioned and legitimized, despite the general mutability of practice. Validation comes in various forms. The views of religious specialists are still sought. Particularly with death rituals, validation may come from family elders. As different practitioners call on different validators and re(invent) rituals in particular ways, divergence emerges in practice. This however, does not create major dissonance for the ritual participants. In part, the lack of a fixed canon in syncretic Chinese religion makes possible wider limits of acceptable forms of ritual performance and interpretation.

I think it is fallacious to assume a unilineal causal relationship between modernization and religion. Contrary to classical western secularization theory, modernization has not resulted in the displacement of traditional belief systems among the Chinese in Singapore. In fact, amidst the widespread changes in society and religious practices, there are strong indications of persistence. To most Chinese, death rituals still occupy a central place. Furthermore, most of the structural features of Chinese death rituals remain quite intact. How can we account for this? Part of the answer may lie in the fact that unlike western religion in which there is a separation between the sacred and the profane, Chinese religious beliefs are closely integrated into Chinese social life and the supernatural realm is intertwined with the human world. Furthermore, while objective knowledge is crucial to the maintenance of the religious system in a western tradition, Chinese religion negates the necessity of total knowledge of the rituals. Instead, the sense of duty and obligation, desire for social conformity and the achievement of calculated self-interests are more important considerations.

References

Ahern, E. M. (1973). *The cult of the dead in a Chinese village*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Comber, L. (1954). *Chinese ancestor worship in Malaya*. Singapore: Donald Moore.

DeGroot, J. J. M. (1892–1910). *The religious system of China* (Vol. 6). London: E. J. Brill.

DeGlopper, D. R. (1974). Religion and ritual in Lukang. In A. P. Wolf (Ed.), *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (pp. 43–69). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Granet, M. (1975). *The religion of the Chinese people*. Translated, edited and introduced by Maurice Freedman. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Hsu, F. L. K. (1949). *Under the ancestors' shadow: Chinese culture and personality*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Maspero, H. (1981). *Taoism and Chinese religion*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Smith, R. J. (1974). Afterword. In A. P. Wolf (Ed.), *Religion and ritual in Chinese society* (pp. 337–348). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Ward, B. (1965). Varieties of the conscious model: The fishermen of South China. In M. Banton (Ed.), *The relevance of models for social anthropology*. New York: ASA Monograph.

Watson, J. L. (1982). Of flesh and bones: The management of death pollution in Cantonese society. In M. Bloch & J. Parry (Eds.), *Death and the regeneration of life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Watson, J. L. (1988). The structure of Chinese funerary rites: Elementary form, ritual sequence, and the primacy of performance. In J. L. Watson & E. Rawski (Eds.), *Death rituals in Late Imperial and modern China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Welch, H. (1967). *The practice of Chinese Buddhism, 1900–1950*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Xu, J. J. (1998). *A history of funeral and burial rituals in China*. Nanchang: Jiangxi Gao Xiao Publishers. [In Chinese].

Yang, C. K. (1961). *Religion in Chinese society: A study of contemporary social functions of religion and some of their historical factors*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Zhang, J. (1995). *A history of funeral and burial rituals in China*. Taipei: Wen Jin Publishers. [In Chinese].

The Bureaucratic Professionalization of Funeral Rites in Tehran's Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery

Zohreh Bayatrizi and Hajar Ghorbani

Abstract The Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery in Tehran, Iran, is one of the largest in the world, containing one and a half million graves. It is the main cemetery for a city of eight million residents. Due to the high volume of bodies arriving for burial everyday as well as the uniformity of Shia Islamic burial rituals, protocols have developed to implement an efficient division of labour and speed up the process. We study how this organizational and bureaucratic division of labour interacts with the community-oriented spirit of Shia Islamic burial rituals, the compromises that have to be, and the human impact. We also examine the implications of these developments for a number of existing theories regarding "modernity" and the "sequestration of death".

It is often argued that in contemporary Western societies both the process of dying itself as well as funeral rituals have become increasingly impersonal, bureaucratized, and individualized. In the words of Mellor and Shilling (1993), death is 'sequestered', meaning that it is separated and isolated from the normal, everyday experiences and hidden behind walls in hospitals and funeral homes. Whereas once people died at home and in the company of others, today they die in impersonal institutions such as hospitals and nursing homes. Whereas once the corpse was prepared and buried by relatives and acquaintances, it is now handled by professionals and strangers. 'Sequestration' is one version of a larger theory about death called the 'denial of death' thesis, according to which some (or all) societies deny and hide the existence of death. It is argued that bureaucratization and professionalization are merely expressions of this desire to deny or hide death. Kellehear (1984, p. 713) describes the denial of death as a "significant but fragmented" quasi-theory that "claims to be the central sociological background and stage for the bulk of our death related behaviour". According to Kellehear (1984), fear of death, medicalization of

Z. Bayatrizi (✉)
Department of Sociology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada
e-mail: Bayatriz@ualberta.ca

H. Ghorbani
University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_7

death, and the twentieth century crisis of individualism are often used in reference to, or as an explanation for, the same phenomenon as the denial of death. Zimmermann and Rodin (2004, p. 122) offer a modified categorization involving five major bodies of sociological evidence for the denial of death thesis relevant from a clinical and palliative care perspective. They include "(1) the taboo on conversation about death; (2) the medicalization of death; (3) the segregation of the dying from the rest of society; (4) the decline of mourning rituals; and (5) death-denying funeral practices".

Is this thesis an accurate portrayal of reality? Cemeteries and funerary rites seem to be a perfect test because in them one comes face to face with the naked reality of death (sometimes literally). While there are some studies of cemeteries and funeral rites in modern societies (see, e.g., Bower 2017), there are few that actually combine a study of the cemetery with a study of bureaucratization and professionalization. That is because most cemeteries are small, run by churches, and nothing much happens in them other than digging up graves, putting bodies in them, perhaps a service and occasional visitations. Our study of the bureaucratization and professionalization of funeral rites in Tehran's Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery is unique in this respect. In this massive cemetery, where over 1.5 million corpses have been buried, an active negotiation goes on between traditional/religious practices and bureaucratic processes. All corpses that are buried there are subject to Shia-Islamic funerary rituals. With the exception of religious minorities, there simply is no choice to legally dispose of a corpse in any other way anywhere in Iran. The religious funerary rituals mandate certain inviolable steps in the procession. At the same time, the implementation of national record keeping and the sheer number of burials per day, which currently stands at around 150–200, makes it necessary to streamline the process and hand it over to professionals and bureaucrats. The outcomes are both efficiency and compromise. Tehran is a mega-city with a population of over eight million people. Therefore, certain bureaucratic phenomena are unique to it. However, other large and medium size cities in Iran such as Mashhad, Esfahan, Shiraz, as well as smaller cities and rural areas have also experienced similar negotiations between traditional local competence and bureaucratic specialization, although these smaller population centres are less bureaucratized and, especially in small towns, show greater flexibility.

On the surface, this study might provide evidence for the increasing sequestration and professionalization of death, but it ultimately shows that the driving force behind professionalization is not a desire to hide or deny or sequester death arising out of a primordial social or psychological fear. Instead, sequestration and professionalization may in fact be the unintended consequences of a pressing need for efficiency. Due to the high volume of corpses that arrive every day and the Islamic requirement to bury the body as soon as possible after death, the cemetery must work efficiently and it cannot have a backlog of corpses. Usually, every corpse that arrives at the morgue during the business hours must be buried on that same day unless it is being sent to another city for burial. This need for efficiency is met through a hierarchical division of labour and by making compromises and modifications to the traditional burial rituals to speed things up. In other words, it is not people's changing attitudes toward death that force changes in burial rites but rather

the material realities on the ground force changes in practice and ultimately in attitudes as well.

In his study of death management in different Western European countries, Walter (2012, p. 123) argues that overall certain key structural factors affect all modern nations: these include "urbanization and the division of labour leading to the dominance of professionals, migration, rationality and bureaucracy, information technology and the risk society". However, he points out, national histories, institutions, and cultures play a major role in how each society responds to those structural factors. The national characteristics of the institutional management of death and dying in each nation is thus formed by its key historical transition points to modernity. While Walter focuses on Western Europe, the case of Tehran can add to, and modify, his argument in several significant ways. Our study will complicate and call into question commonly-held Eurocentric views on modernity, modernization, and its consequences. It is often assumed that modernity and its accompanying phenomena, such as bureaucratization, professionalization, division of labour, and medicalization, originate in the West from whence it spreads outwards to other parts of the world. Yet, our study shows that the modern infra-structure of death management and attitudes toward it at Tehran's cemetery are not rooted in Western culture but rather in the local material realities that make it necessary to develop and expand unique institutional tools and practices not found in the West.

Tehran's current cemetery is called Behesht-e Zahra (literally, The Paradise of Zahra, named after Prophet Mohammad's daughter) first opened on 314 ha of land in the southern outskirts of the city in 1970 in a bid to provide a permanent and centralized burial site for its rapidly growing population. Up until then local residents had buried their dead in one of the several graveyards within the city (Behesht-e Zahra, undated).[1] Although at first the cemetery struggled to find a taker for its first grave, due to its distance from the city, lack of high-speed public transit, and scarcity of car ownership at the time, it now has over 1.5 million graves and has expanded to incorporate an additional 110 ha in 1997 and another 160 ha in 2009. The eight-year war with Iraq (1980–1988) created a sharp rise in burials for the fallen soldiers who were buried in a dedicated parcel and gave the cemetery additional political and sentimental significance. A massive development project began in 1989 with the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, founder of the Islamic Republic, which led to the creation of a mausoleum and a major cultural, religious and tourist complex adjacent to the cemetery. With the expansion of car ownership and the extension of the subway line, the cemetery currently accommodates on average about 15,000 visitors per day with a major spike on the weekends. There are 164 lots in the cemetery, 18 of which are dedicated to the 'martyrs' and their parents, 3 to journalists, cultural and entertainment figures, and one to organ donors. These lots are located in prime spots in the older part of the cemetery, which are easier to access and highly sought after. The vast majority of the remaining lots are divided into one-, two-, and

[1] All citations of Behesht-e Zahra, undated refer to information taken from the website of Behesht-e Zahra: http://beheshtezahra.tehran.ir/Default.aspx?tabid=171

three-tier graves. One-tier graves in the new parts of the cemetery can be obtained free of charge. Multi-tired graves and graves in more desirable plots are up for sale.

Up until 1991, the cemetery had one building, which was a dedicated ablution (ritual washing and purification) facility. In that year, the Behesht-e Zahra Organization was officially created and a building built using Iranian and Islamic architectural motifs to house the morgue, ablution facility, reception, registration, banking and other bureaucratic offices. Although Behesht-e Zahra is officially run by the City of Tehran, it was forced to become financially self-sufficient in 1993 with revenues generated through fees for burial services as well as the sale of family mausoleums and multi-level graves, surcharges for burials in the older parcels, and renting out commercial space for flower shops, headstone shops, and other related services (Behesht-e Zahra, undated).

As a result of the above developments, the Behesht-e Zahra Organization has expanded rapidly, creating various bureaucratic arms to cope with a variety of tasks from the daily handling of bodies, to ongoing maintenance, event planning for special occasions (prime among them the anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini's death every June), human resources management, and long term strategic planning. Here we will focus only on the professionalization and bureaucratization of the funeral rituals, that is the handling of the body from when it arrives at the cemetery until it has been buried, including corpse washing, wrapping, prayers, graveside rites, and burial.

We draw on data from a nine-month long field-work in Behesht-e Zahra in 2015 and interviews with management, paid staff and volunteers. One of the authors signed up for training to join the volunteer ablution team at the cemetery and recorded her observations while there. She also interviewed staff and management from the CEO to corpse-washers and gravediggers. In addition, we have also interviewed elderly residents of Tehran in order to reconstruct how funeral rituals were traditionally undertaken before their centralization in Behesht-e Zahra. In this work we make occasional references to 'traditional' funerals as opposed to how funerals are currently conducted at Behesht-e Zahra. However, 'tradition' and 'traditional' need qualifications. Tradition is not a set of timeless practices and beliefs that can be objectively identified and delimited (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Funeral traditions are not an exception in this regard (Walter 2014, p. 39). Sometimes tradition is used to refer to the prevailing beliefs and practices that existed (or are imagined to have existed) before a wave of change swept in. It is in this very limited, and admittedly arbitrary, sense that we refer to funerary traditions in Iran and in Tehran. From the creation of the Behesht-e Zahra cemetery in 1970, changes in funerary practices must have accelerated, especially post 1993 when the cemetery was incorporated as a non-profit bureaucratic organization. But even here our job is made difficult by the fact that there are not many reliable sources on how funerals were carried out in Tehran before the creation of Behesht-e Zahra. Instead, we have relied on our interviews with ten older local residents who had participated in funerals before 1970 when the new cemetery was created.

The Professionalization of Rituals

Professionalization and increasing specialization, complex division of labour, and bureaucratization are major features of modern societies, which have been critically studied by sociologists from the late nineteenth century. While acknowledging the efficiency that these phenomena create, sociologists have lamented the loss of personal and community-based competence, the depersonalization of encounters, and the alienating affects of these trends. The professionalization and bureaucratization of funerary rituals are not an exception. Jessica Mitford's classic study, *The American Way of Death* (1964) is a fascinating study of how the funeral home industry took control of funeral rituals, commercialized it, and found new ways to harness the emotional vulnerability of the grieving survivors to upsell funerary products and services (see also, Parsons 2018).

The situation is very different in Iran because private mortuaries and funeral homes do not exist. The rituals, customs, and ceremonies that constitute the totality of funeral services are generally divided into two parts. The first is body disposal, which is in the exclusive control of each municipality and can only take place in their centralized facilities at the municipal cemetery. The second part includes all the peripheral services such as the mourning and memorial service (which are commonly held in the city rather than in the cemetery), flower arrangements, making and installing gravestones, and so on. These aspects are left to the private sector, but these services themselves have not yet been brought together as one business, preventing the formation of any sort of centralized, privatized funeral management sector akin to what Mitford critically discusses. However, there is still plenty of room for professionalization, bureaucratization, division of labour and impersonalization.

Before we investigate the professionalization of rituals, let us first look at what these rituals consist of. Funeral rituals have significant functions. In a time of crisis created by the encounter with death, these rituals help create a sense of order, stability, and certainty by providing a more or less rigid and known script for action. Not only do they make provisions for the practical aspects of burial (such as how the body should be handled and where it must be laid to rest), but also they provide appropriate avenues for the emotional experience and expressions of the survivors (see Cassell et al. 2005, p. 228). While in Iran these rituals are primarily characterized as Islamic, it is hard to pinpoint exactly what constitutes Islamic funeral rituals because the actual practice of Islam is different in different parts of the Islamic world, including many variations within Iran itself. In addition, there are ritual elements that are cultural rather than strictly religious. However, among Shia-Muslims in Iran, the funeral rites have three compulsory core religious components that must be performed in every single case: ablution (ritual purification through washing) and enshrouding rituals, the prayer of the dead, and burial rituals. The first involves bathing the body three times using camphor, dried cedar leaves, and plain water, anointing the body with more camphor, and then wrapping it in three pieces of plain

and modest white cloth (usually cotton). This bathing component is modified in cases where the body is not in a state suitable for washing.

The second step is to perform the ritual prayer of the dead, a modified version of daily prayers normally led by a clergyman and the last step involves laying the body to rest directly in a grave on its right side facing Mecca, using a clump of soil to prop up the head, and performing *talghin* (suggestion). During *talghin*, a family member holds the shoulders of the deceased inside the grave, shakes it firmly (to arouse the attention of the deceased), calls him/her by name and recites testaments of faith in his or her ear in order to prepare them for the questioning that the deceased are believed to undergo in the first night after burial. After this point, a flat tablet of stone is positioned so as to protect the head. Then the grave is filled. There are detailed instructions as how and by whom the body can be handled at every step. In practice, religious rituals as actually performed are more elaborate and go beyond the bare minimum explained above. For instance, the coffin or stretcher is carried toward the grave in three phases and is lowered to the ground three times, the third time at the graveside. Or just before burial the shroud is lifted from the face for a final visitation and sorrow stories and songs are sung. Once the grave is filled, the top is sprinkled with rose water, covered with a black drape, and marked by a temporary marker. People usually linger around the graveside because they believe that it is only after the burial that the deceased realizes that they are dead. He or she tries to get up and leave but his or her head hits the flat stone, causing panic and fright. People stay at the graveside not only to mourn but also to keep company with the deceased until the deceased accepts his or her predicament. On that evening, people usually perform a special prayer of fright, which again is meant to help the deceased through the frightful questioning, and at dawn on the following day, they visit the grave to bring the good news to the deceased that the frightful night is over.

Within the body of instructions for funerary rites in Islamic *fiqh* (religious rulings), it is considered an obligation for Muslims in the community to undertake the ablution, wrapping, prayer and burial of a deceased Muslim as soon as possible after death. Muslims who come across another Muslim's dead body, even a stranger's, are required to take steps to dispose of it according to Islamic specifications. The duty is imposed on the whole collectivity and is only lifted once one or more individuals have begun this undertaking and carried it through. If no one acts, they have all sinned. On this point, both major branches of Islam (Shia and Sunni) agree, showing that the dignified religious disposal of the corpse is a core unifying Islamic belief. Reading between the lines of these rulings, the underlying assumption seems to be that the duty to prepare and bury the corpse would be carried out by volunteers. In fact, while the *fiqh* is silent about payments for funerals in general, it has an explicit prohibition on receiving money for the ritual ablution (bathing) of the body (Behesht-e Zahra, undated). Instead, it is required that the persons bathing the corpse make an explicit and conscious resolution to carry out the ablution "to please God" and to maintain this resolution throughout the process. The Prophet Mohammad is quoted as saying that those who help bathe a Muslim corpse would be immune from the fire of hell and their path to heaven would be illuminated by divine light. This belief gives extra incentive to people to volunteer for this task and

some people even aim for bathing four (or seven) corpses before they die. Traditionally bathing and draping would have taken place at home by relatives and the burial would also be handled by the next of (able-bodied) kin. Today, this process is carried out in professionally-run ablution halls in cemeteries. Our anecdotal conversations with our own older relatives and friends indicate that some Iranians, especially in smaller cities and rural areas, experience unease about the fact that their loved ones would be handled by staff at ablution facilities, and in recognition of this fact, cemeteries allow the relatives to participate in or at least oversee the bathing and enshrouding process. Apart from the above, another indication of the communitarian and collectivist spirit of Islamic funeral rituals is that, since Muslim corpses must be buried in the ground and cremation is not allowed, it is incumbent on the community to provide a graveyard that is accessible to everyone regardless of the financial ability to pay.

How do these communitarian, emotive, and spiritual orientations square with the present-day realities of death in a mega-city where high demand, scarcity of resources, and neo-liberalization of government services make the commercialization, professionalization, and bureaucratization of the process inevitable? We try to answer this question by focusing on three intertwined questions: First we focus on the management and reproduction of the emotional space in the cemetery. How does a large cemetery with a heavy workload manage and restrict emotional expressions while also creating a space for their orderly discharge?

Second, we focus on the bureaucratic and organizational processes of burial. As mentioned above, funeral rites are deeply enshrined in religion and cultural customs, giving them an aura of sanctity and inviolability. As a sacred rite, funerals are not supposed to be subjected to monetary and mundane considerations, such as payment of wages, and thus they stand in stark contrast to the routinized workflow and financial transactions of a typical bureaucratic organization. In addition, bureaucratic professionalization collides with the religious duty of collective participation in funeral rituals. How does a bureaucratic organization reconcile these opposing demands for professionalization and routinization, on the one hand, and collective participation in a religious duty, on the other?

Last, we examine the social division of labour in the cemetery. Islam encourages the burial of the corpse as soon as possible after death, which necessitates streamlining the process to meet daily demands. This streamlining involves dividing labour in the cemetery in order to achieve efficiency and maximum speed. Yet the division of labour itself creates a labyrinth for the grieving family to navigate. How do families navigate the bureaucracy of death in Behesht-e Zahra?

The Cemetery: Emotional Space and Professional Divisions

There are few events in life that can stir human emotions as does death. The management of emotions is highly important in both traditional and modern, professionalized forms of burial.

Traditionally, it has been customary in Iran to respect the survivors' right to grieve. It is simply expected that survivors will lose themselves and wail loudly. In fact, while extreme expressions (such as harming oneself) are prevented, it is considered unhealthy for the grieving person to block their tears or emotional outbursts. It is also not unheard of for survivors, especially of a young person, to throw themselves on the corpse or try to prevent or delay its burial out of sheer grief and disbelief. Others require a lot of time to say goodbye to their loved ones. The traditional, lay undertaking of funeral processions created a lot of space for the expression of grief. Usually, death would occur at home or close to home. In the latter case, the body would be brought back to home ahead of the funeral procession. Where death was expected, relatives would gather around the dying person, say their goodbyes, recite the Quran, and stay at the bedside. Upon death, other family members, neighbours, and acquaintances would be notified to gather at the home to grieve and accompany the family. Ordinarily, an organic and spontaneous division of labour would be formed; a few people of the same sex as the deceased would wash and wrap the body either at home, at a river, or at the dedicated ablution facility at the graveyard. People would often want to take part in this ritual out of affection, respect, and also to garner religious favours with God. Typically, a woman would be washed by her daughters, sisters, aunts, and/or cousins and a man by his sons, brothers, uncles, and/or cousins. Once the body is wrapped, more people would be allowed by its side for visitation, praying, and grieving. The body would then be carried to the cemetery on foot, in a solemn procession. Again family and acquaintances (normally males) would take turns carrying the coffin or stretcher above their heads while prayers and testaments of faith are recited. The grave would be dug up by men in the community while the relatives mourned. The burial itself is a highly emotional moment and it is often paused so close family members can embrace the body and say their final goodbyes. Eventually, the body is entered in the grave by family members (usually brothers, sons, or sons in law) and the final testaments of faith remembered to it. A clergyman might take part in leading the prayer of the dead before burial and in reciting the testaments of faith. A professional or amateur *maddah* (specializing in the burial service and leading a mourning ceremony) might step in to recite sorrow stories from the suffering, death, and grief of sacred figures in Shia Islam in order to both help the family grieve and to remind them of their duty to be patient and accept God's will. This portion would finish with a eulogy to the deceased. The gathered crowed would stay at the grave and mourn not only out of their own desire to be close to the departed but also to provide consolation and company to the deceased (as discussed above). Back in the city, a feast would be served to the crowd and it too would be prepared by neighbours and acquaintances while the family grieves.

Over time, as death has retreated from the private sphere of the home and increasingly subjected to medical, public health and state administrative considerations, some of the above traditions have also been transformed or abandoned. In Tehran, the process begins with obtaining a certificate of death and permission for burial from the hospital or the medical examiners. A call is then made to the cemetery and an ambulance is arranged to carry the body from home to Behesht-e Zahra. If death

happens at a hospital, some families choose to bring the corpse home first, although this is not practical in high-rises. In either case, a crowd gathers and a small procession is held carrying the body to the ambulance. From here on almost to the end the family is separated from the corpse and there are no opportunities for physical-emotional action, except for a brief period during the pre-burial ceremony which is led by the *maddah* and during which the survivors can grieve directly over the body. The emotional climax of these funeral rituals is when the corpse is placed in the grave, the veil removed from the face according to tradition, and the family can say their final goodbyes. The ablution facility used to have a window from which the family was allowed to observe the washing but that has now been blocked due to concerns over the privacy of the deceased and the staff. Our observations indicate that, in a departure from the traditional solemnity of the funeral procession, at Behesht-e Zahra the rituals are rushed and cut to a bare minimum. There simply is not much room or time for lingering and mourning. The clergyman leading the prayer goes from one corpse to the next and so does the official who carries out the pre-burial and burial ceremonies. Other parts of the funeral rituals are likewise subject to timetables and bureaucratic rules rather than to the emotional needs of the family.

Tehran's cemetery, after its modernization in 1991, includes a morgue, ambulance services, separate ablution facilities for men and women, as well as various bureaus. Like every organization, the Behesht-e Zahra Organization has a hierarchy and a division of labour among professionals as well as skilled and unskilled workers. Various branches are in charge of finance, long-term planning and development, maintenance, event planning for special occasions, transportation, security, and so on. Funeral rituals are the exclusive jurisdiction of one of these branches, called *Orujian* (literally, the ascendants). It includes a morgue, ablution facility, and a prayer hall, and it also is in charge of the graveside service and burial. There is a finer division of labour within each of these functions as well. For instance, the ablution facility is itself divided into female and male halls. Each is run by a manager who oversees scheduling, staffing, and procurement of ablution supplies, among other things. In each hall, the ablution of each corpse is undertaken by four people: a supervising corpse washer who ensures all the ritual requirements are met, two assistant corpse-washers, and a person who specializes in wrapping the body. All the staff also work under the supervision of a religious expert who supervises washing practices and helps find a religious resolution in difficult cases where the condition of the body makes ritual ablution difficult or impossible (e.g., bodies in various stages of decomposition). In such cases, the religious expert might have to consult the offices of high-ranking Islamic jurists if the nature of the case is unique. A set of tracks running through the washing hall facilitates moving corpses from the morgue to the washing hall and from there to the prayer hall. To the side, there is a two-story lounge and kitchen where two dedicated staff members prepare food and tea and clean up. Once the body is washed and wrapped it is placed back on a stretcher and sent on the rails to the prayer hall. A large tunnel in the wall connects the ablution facility to the prayer hall. Staff compare this tunnel to the birth canal through which an infant is born and argue that it symbolizes the person's rebirth and

the start of his or her journey to the other world. This may have been an intentional design decision when the Orujian Complex was built but we are not certain about that. At the prayer hall clergymen work in the dedicated capacity of leading the prayer of the dead for each corpse after it has been washed and wrapped. Prayer is held for up to 12 corpses at a time with the participation of their families and friends. Once the prayer is held the transportation team sends an ambulance to take the body to the assigned grave, where a *maddah* and a *khaksepar* (specializing in burying the body) are awaiting them (Chart 1).

The Orujian Complex features a waiting room for the family and a reception area. Here a member of the deceased's immediate family must present the death certificate and burial permit upon which the deceased's information is entered in computers and a file created. He/she must also present the deceased national vital statistics booklet (which every Iranian has and which is used for identification as well as recording birth, marriage, children, divorce, voting, and death), which will be promptly annulled by the Registrar of Vital Statistics present at the cemetery. At this point an ablution permit is produced and a grave assigned. But the family member must still pay for and obtain a permit for temporary grave marker, *termeh* (a paisley patterned cloth that is used as additional draping over the washed and wrapped body), burial services, as well as for tables and chairs. If the family opts to hold the post-burial feast at the cemetery or obtain any other additional services there (such as printing death notices or flowers), they pay for that as well. Lastly, if a multi-tiered grave or a grave in a special lot or part of the cemetery is desired, additional (often hefty) fees must be paid. The invoices are taken to the bank on site and the sum of all fees paid. From there, the relevant permits must be delivered to the right places. Wrapping must be obtained and taken to the ablution facility along

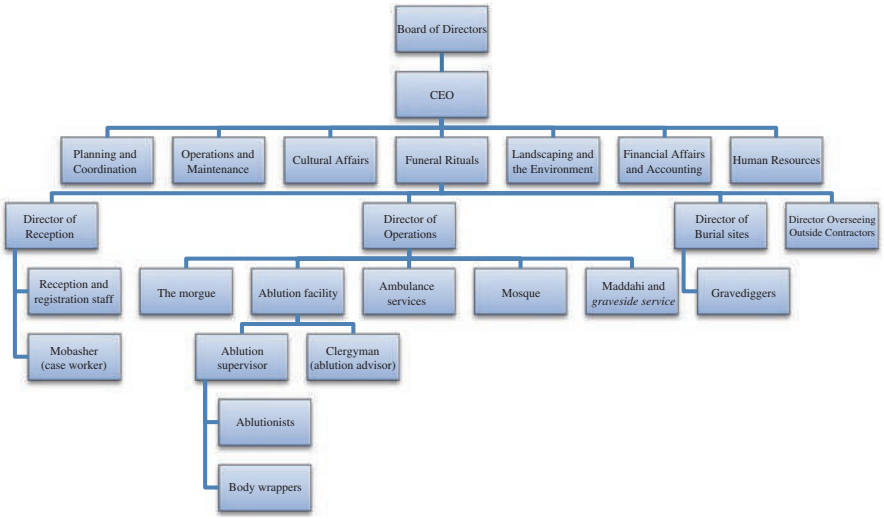


Chart 1 Partial organizational chart of the Behesht-e Zahra Organization, focusing on funeral service and the ablution facility

with the ablution permit, a temporary grave marker must be obtained from the relevant section, and *termeh* and other services must likewise be obtained or arranged. Then the waiting begins for washing and wrapping and for any remaining family and friends to arrive so that the prayer can be held and burial began. Airport style monitors in the waiting room display current information for each corpse and where it is for the family to see.

Traditionally, a couple of friends or acquaintances would undertake the whole funeral arrangements. Typically, this would include male cousins, nephews, neighbours, and the like (more on the gender aspect later). This division of labour would ensure that those closer to the deceased, especially the immediate family members, could focus on their grief and not have to deal with mundane tasks. But the bureaucratization and formalization of the funeral arrangements has made it necessary to have a close kin with an official ID card to undertake the above arrangements at the cemetery. To help families navigate this process, a new category of staff called *mobashers* were trained and hired starting in 2011. *Mobashers* are akin to caseworkers; one is assigned to each family at arrival and accompanies the family representative throughout the process, including obtaining the permits, locating the grave, and ensuring that staffing is scheduled for prayers and burial. Today about 90 of them are employed on a fulltime basis.

The specialization and professionalization of tasks has led to the emergence of a whole new vocabulary for positions in the organizational division of labour. The new vocabulary is partly meant to bring dignity to these jobs, partly functions to distinguish these positions from traditional and lay functions, and partly acts to eliminate explicit terminology associated with death and replace them with newer, vague, and euphemistic words that avoid explicitly morbid evocations: *Mordeshoor-khaneh* (lit. the house for washing the dead) has become *salon-e tathir* (purification hall). Mordeh shoor (lit. washer of the dead or corpse-washer) has become *tathir konandeh* (lit. purifier or ablutionist). *Kafan* (the word exclusively used for the simple white wrap for the corpse) has become *khal'at* (a fancy silk coat with gold and silk threads that one would receive from a king). Traditionally, the person washing the body would have also wrapped it too but in Tehran due to the heavy workload there is now a dedicated position for that task and the person performing it is called *khal'atbor* (robe fitter). *Goorkan* (gravedigger) has for all intents and purposes disappeared. Instead, construction workers (typically Afghan migrants) are hired by the municipality to dig up and construct graves using concrete and other modern supplies. In Tehran, this function has now been separated from that of *khaksepar* or the person who buries the body and fills the grave. The introduction of these new titles was the initiative of a former CEO of Behesht-e Zahra who intended to help fight the stigma that has traditionally been inflicted on corpse-washers and gravediggers. In fact, apart from tradition, even religious belief associates stigma with such positions. While Muslims can accrue favours with God for helping wash and bury Muslim corpses, they are banned from receiving money for ablution of a corpse and, in addition, they are discouraged from engaging in the sale of *kafan* (the white wrap for the corpse).

One significant feature of traditional burials that has persisted and fully incorporated in the bureaucratized and professionalized process of Behesht-e Zahra is the gendered division of labour. In many societies arrangements for funeral rituals are often undertaken by men (Olson 2018; Hockey et al. 2010). In Iran too, traditionally, arrangement for the funeral and mourning rituals were left to men who had greater freedom of movement, stronger professional networks, and supposedly had better mastery over their emotions than women to run errands amidst the chaos caused by death. They would also be the ones to dig up the grave, carry the coffin in the funeral procession, lead the prayer of the dead, place the body in the grave, carry out the last rites, and fill the grave. For instance, in accordance with tradition, the final ritual of 'suggestion' in the grave for female corpses is supposed to be carried out by their daughter's husband, which already assumes that women die as mothers of married daughters. For men, other close male relatives would carry out this ritual. Women were involved in funeral and mourning related work too but mostly in the domestic duties of cooking, cleaning, washing and wrapping the body (if the deceased was female), and taking care of the physical and emotional well-being of the survivors. Some of this gendered division of labour is rooted in religion: for instance only a man can lead the prayer and a man can perform the graveside service (singing of sorrow songs and reciting the testaments of faith to the deceased).

The Behesht-e Zahra Organization has preserved this traditional division of labour to a great extent. It is a male dominant space. All *mobashers* (case-workers) are male, and so are all the grave-fillers, all the clergymen, the entire management team, the entire grounds maintenance crew (which is outsourced), and all ambulance drivers. The majority of the women working at Behesht-e Zahra are employed (or volunteer) in the female ablution facility because corpses must be washed by individuals of their own gender. Transgender individuals who have had gender-reassignment surgery will be washed according to their reassigned gender. There are rules regarding the assignment of gender to individuals who do not have a clear biological gender. In most cases, a gender would have been assigned to such individuals during their life according to Shia-Islamic jurisprudence. Outside of the female ablution facility, the only other positions that can be theoretically filled by women are emergency workers and office staff, although we do not have exact data on the gender composition of these positions. We saw a few women in the library and finance and administration offices. These women are hired under strict conditions: they must comply strictly with Islamic hijab rules and even go above and beyond to wear a black chador (a head to toe shroud), and they cannot wear makeup at work.

Compromising Bureaucracy

While the cemetery adheres strictly to Islamic rules, it has had to implement policies and procedures that seem to be in direct violation of the letter and/or the spirit of Shia-Islamic rules. For instance, the ablution staff are all paid, in direct violation

of the religious prohibition on receiving payments for corpse-washing. In interviews with the staff, they commonly brought up the fact that they worked there out of economic necessity but also repeated what must have been the official organization line that ablution is an honourable job and something that the prophet and other sacred figures of Islam commonly undertook. Yet the stigma remains and they are aware of it. One staff member mentioned that her in-laws were completely unaware that she worked in the ablution facility. In recognition of this fact and the psychological and physical strain of corpse-washing and wrapping, the ablution staff are given generous pay, a light work schedule (two days on and one day off), loans with favourable terms, deep discounts on airplane travel, and many other perks. The municipality is now negotiating with the parliament to grant the staff the right to early retirement with full benefits. Another area of compromise is the sale of *kafan* (the cloth in which the corpse is wrapped). While there is no outright ban on it in Islam, Muslims are discouraged from engaging in the sale of this item as a job. Yet, *kafan* is routinely sold at Behesht-e Zahra.

But what about the communitarian spirit of Islamic funeral rites which are supposed to be undertaken by duty-bound volunteers? In fact, all is not lost in this process. Amidst the streamlining and professionalization, space has opened up for the return of communitarian values and practices. The Behesht-e Zahra Organization has made it possible for family members to participate in washing and wrapping their own loved ones (still under the supervision of the regular staff). In addition, the cemetery has trained hundreds of volunteers to work in the main ablution facility, both as a preparation measure in case of a major disaster but also as a recognition of the religious communitarian spirit of the rituals. Currently, 400 of these volunteers have signed up to occasionally join the facility (IRNA 2017). Previously, the ablution hall had windows from which relatives could watch the ritual purification of their loved ones. However, those were closed off after it was discovered that men disguised as women were watching the women's ablution hall.

Despite the cemetery's effort to revive or preserve the family and community-oriented letter and spirit of Shia-Islamic funerary rituals, it appears that decades of bureaucratic sequestration of death have had their effect. For instance, even though families are now allowed to participate in the ablution ritual, very few indeed take part it in. In addition, our conversations with *khaksepar-ha* (grave-fillers) indicate that some people refuse to enter the grave and carry out the 'suggestion' rites. According to religious rules, when the deceased is female, the corpse cannot be touched by men who are not her close kin (husband, brother, father, son, son-in-law). This includes the 'suggestion' rituals in which one of these male relatives must enter the grave and shake the shoulders of the deceased while the testaments of faith are remembered to her. Traditionally, this task has been performed by a son-in-law, if available. However, grave-fillers recount cases in which neither the son-in-law nor any other close male relative was willing to do this because of fears associated with entering the grave or touching the corpse, forcing the grave-filler to step in and perform the task in clear violation of the ban on touching female corpses.

Another area in which rules or procedure have been relaxed is the graveside mourning ceremony. Traditionally, only the recitation of the Quran and religious

sorrow songs were performed. However, more recently, in a move toward greater individualization of the ceremony, people are allowed to hire musicians to perform secular music in addition to the religious service. Often *maddahs* facilitate the hiring of these performers. But generally, as far as the religious components of the rituals are concerned, there is little to no room for individualization and all corpses undergo the same process. However, outside the cemetery and during the mourning rituals space is open for both community action and individualization and customization. The mourning rites begin once the funeral rites are over. Traditionally, people would hold three nights of mourning starting right after the funeral, followed by two other mourning ceremonies on the seventh and fortieth night after burial. These ceremonies would involve mourning, recitation of the Quran, and a feast. For these ceremonies, death notices and black banners are posted around the house and the neighbourhood where the deceased used to live. The mourning ceremonies have now been cut down to only one public ceremony with a feast and smaller private ceremonies and graveside visits on the other occasions. Most of the work associated with these ceremonies are still organized by family and acquaintances with minimal assistance from the newly emerging event management sector.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Our study indicates that the driving force behind the sequestration, professionalization, and bureaucratization of funeral rites is not a change in attitudes but major demographic shifts in Tehran that, in connection with certain Islamic rules and traditions, made it necessary to streamline and centralize the process. Islamic rules mandate that all Muslim corpses be buried as soon as possible, regardless of ability to pay for funerals or a grave. In a mega-city such as Tehran these factors necessitate a massive operation. No doubt this operation could have taken different forms. The city could have had several cemeteries instead of one and greater emphasis could have been placed on encouraging and facilitating people's participation. Indeed, as Behesht-e Zahra nears its full capacity, plans are being discussed to create two new cemeteries, one in the eastern and one in the western outskirts of Tehran. It remains to be seen how these new cemeteries (if they're built) would be operated.

There are several issues that we were not able to study but merit further attention. One is the extent of potential resistance to the uniform burial rites at Behesht-e Zahra. We do know that certain groups avoid burials at this cemetery. For instance, those belonging to some Sufi spiritual communities bury their dead in smaller cities where the family may have originally come from and where there is normally more flexibility. Another interesting group is secular families who, one would imagine, would prefer a secular burial. However, we have not come across any significant resistance on that account. In fact, our anecdotal observations show that at the time of death, many secular families and families who do not actively practice Islam, adopt a very rigid adherence to the ritual rules and insist that all the necessary steps be taken in accordance with Shia-Islamic rules. They participate in the prayer of the

dead, even though they may never had performed their own daily prayers and perform the ritual of suggestion. While we have not spoken to these families, we speculate that they desire to avail their deceased family member all the relevant rituals 'just in case'.

Another issue that we did not closely investigate is the economic hierarchy of the cemetery (Hallam et al. 2005). Tehran is a city of massive inequalities and it is interesting to see how these inequalities are reflected at Behesht-e Zahra. Islam mandates that everyone is buried in exactly the same type of wrap and without any coffins, ensuring that all corpses are equal. The washing and prayers are also exactly the same for everyone. In addition, since no one can be denied funeral rites or a grave, the cemetery is obligated to accept and perform all the necessary funerary rituals for paupers and for unidentified or abandoned corpses. Discounts are also available to poor families who cannot afford to pay for services. However, there are still plenty of ways in which economic inequality affects the dead. For instance, people may opt to be buried in family plots and mausoleums or graves in the old part of the cemetery, which are all very expensive as opposed to the free graves that are available to everyone. People can also purchase multi-tiered graves. Expensive headstones and payment for regular gardening and maintenance around the grave are also other ways in which people distinguish their loved ones' graves from others. There are also companies who offer to regularly visit and pray at graves in exchange for a payment, a service that is especially marketed to Iranians living abroad. The workings of these inequalities merit further investigation.

Lastly, the politics of the cemetery deserve further attention (Bernstein 2006; McElya 2016; Derrida and Morton 2017). The cemetery is a political space and while doing research there we had a sense that it was treated as such by management. Part of the politics of the cemetery obviously relates to the fact that Ayatollah Khomeini and other major political figures as well as fallen soldiers are buried there. In 2017, a terrorist attack was carried out on the mausoleum of Ayatollah Khomeini. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack which killed two workers and injured five people. Simultaneously an attack was carried out in the city on the parliament building, taking the lives of an additional ten victims. But there are other factors at play. One of the burial plots in the cemetery is dedicated to political figures and militia who were killed or executed in the immediate aftermath of the 1979 Revolution. Currently a separate plot is reserved for "the executed", individuals who are hanged for drug trafficking, sexual offences, and homicide, among other things. Funeral rites for these individuals are limited to about an hour at the end of the workday and take place under restrictive conditions (such as limits on who and how many participants can attend). Still another sensitive issue concerns the graves of oppositional political figures as well as people who have died in recent years during protests or under suspicious circumstances in prison and elsewhere. Families have reported being subjected to hastily arranged funerals in which the family has little say and facing restrictions on holding mourning ceremonies at the graveside or even in the city. Although funeral rites are held for all these figures in accordance to Shia-Islamic principles, their gravesites still represent liminal spaces in which bureaucracy, religion, and politics are intertwined.

References

Bernstein, A. (2006). *Modern passings: Death rites, politics, and social change in imperial Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Bower, C. B. (2017). *Dying to be modern: Cataraqui Cemetery, romanticism, consumerism, and the extension of modernity in Kingston, Ontario, 1780–1900.* Western University: Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Depository.

Cassell, D. K., Salinas, R. C., & Winn, P. S. (2005). *The encyclopedia of death and dying*. Facts On File.

Derrida, J., & Morton, T. (2017). Notes toward the possibility of a postmortem politics. *Mortal assemblages: Rhetorics of ecology and death* (pp. 258–281), dissertation by J.T. Barnett, The University of Utah.

Hallam, E., Hockey, J., & Howarth, G. (2005). *Beyond the body: Death and social identity*. London: Routledge.

Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. (Eds.). (1983). *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hockey, J., Komaromy, C., & Woodthorpe, K. (Eds.). (2010). *The matter of death: Space, place and materiality*. London: Palgrave.

IRNA. (2017). *Ozviat 800 nafar dar kanun-e tathir konandegan-e behesht-e Zahra* [Eight-hundred volunteers have joined the Ablution Team at Behesht-e Zahra Organization]. http://www.irna.ir/fa/News/82792121. Last accessed 22 June 2018.

Kellehear, A. (1984). Are we a 'death-denying'society? A sociological review. *Social Science & Medicine, 18*(9), 713–721.

McElya, M. (2016). *The politics of mourning: Death and honor in Arlington National Cemetery*. Boston: Harvard University Press.

Mellor, P. A., & Shilling, C. (1993). Modernity, self-identity and the sequestration of death. *Sociology, 27*(3), 411–431.

Mitford, J. (1964). *The American way of death*. New York: Fawcett Crest.

Olson, P. R. (2018). Domesticating deathcare: The women of the US Natural Deathcare Movement. *Journal of Medical Humanities, 39*(2), 195–215.

Parsons, B. (2018). *The evolution of the British funeral industry in the 20th century: From undertaker to funeral director*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing.

Walter, T. (2012). Why different countries manage death differently: A comparative analysis of modern urban societies. *The British Journal of Sociology, 63*, 123–145.

Walter, T. (2014). Sociological perspectives on death, dying, and bereavement. In T. Attig & J. Stillion (Eds.), *Death, dying, and bereavement: contemporary perspectives, institutions, and practices* (pp. 31–44). New York: Springer.

Zimmermann, C., & Rodin, G. (2004). The denial of death thesis: Sociological critique and implications for palliative care. *Palliative Medicine, 18*(2), 121–128.

Death and Burial Practices in Contemporary Zulu Culture, South Africa

Sihawukele Ngubane

Abstract Customs and rituals vary between cultures and between religious affiliations within any community. Human burial practices are a manifestation of the human desire to demonstrate respect for the dead. Burials are an attempt to bring closure to the deceased's family and friends, thus lessening the pain. Christian burials observe the ecclesiastical rites of burying the deceased under the ground. Similarly, most Africans, especially the Zulu people of South Africa, believe that burying their loved ones in the grave is the most respectful practice and a gateway to the ancestors. This article looks at the burial practices and beliefs of the Zulu people. More broadly, it examines the way of life of the Zulus, and their philosophies with regard to grief, mourning and the rituals of death in relation to the two chief practices of inhumation and cremation. The practice of cremation, which is becoming an option for some Zulu people, will be explored and analysed. The article argues that, among most Africans, inhumation, or burial, is the preferred method of paying last respects to the deceased.

Keywords African spirituality · Shades · Ancestral spirits · Christianity · Cemeteries · Zulu burial customs · Xhosa burial customs · Inhumation · Cremation · South Africa · Durban burials

Introduction

Africans in South Africa are faced with difficult ideological and lifestyle choices. Educated and enlightened Africans emphasise the fact that culture is dynamic, but in adopting Western values, in the name of civilisation, modernity, progress and development, they are also alienating themselves from their traditional norms and values. The concept of evolving culture is based on the understanding that human culture changes. Culture is the way of life of a people that is determined by socially

S. Ngubane (✉)
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa
e-mail: Ngubanes@ukzn.ac.za

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_8

transmitted beliefs, knowledge, customs, skills, attitudes and language. Cultural change is subjected to variation and competition between two worldviews, Western and African, and the manner in which culture is inherited from the old order.

Societies change over time and yet the big question is who drives the changes, for whom, and why? Change leads to complexity in a society or culture, as in the time and space where we find ourselves in democratic South Africa in the twenty-first century. Socio-cultural evolution is the process by which structural reorganization is mainly affected through time, eventually producing a new structure, which is different from the ancestral form. There is always a desire to go back to the traditional way of doing things, but the environment has changed and does not allow this to happen. We find ourselves in a dilemma, choosing culture that will be in line with modernity. Western culture continues to play a significant role in influencing African burial systems. Modern ways of burial are now the norm and, especially in the towns and cities, traditional practices such as spitting on the grave, burying the personal belongings of the dead person, slaughtering an animal to cover the body of the deceased, and throwing sand over it, are rejected as primitive. There has thus been a transition from the traditional burial to the western funeral practice. The growth of the population and the resulting scarcity, in and around the cities, of unused land for burial grounds, have also influenced burial practices. In contrast to rural burials, urban burials involve the coordination of many different agencies: the local authorities and the bureaucracy of the urban system, the clergy, the coroner, and the florist. Funeral parlours are big business and their efficient facilities often favour crematoria over cemetery burial. The cost of funerals has escalated to such an extent that the poor can no longer afford them. According to traditional thought, such funerals demonstrate a lack of respect for the dead person. That is because in this modern burial system people are forced to pay their respects at the funeral firm instead of at the home of the deceased person, and the significance of participating at the burial of loved ones is lost. Sometimes, an excavator is used to fill the grave with earth, whereas traditionally graves are filled in by people who attend the burial. These people may be close friends, family members and the community at large. Everything adds to the cost, with the contemporary urban funeral being characterised by a lavish coffin, which is ideally followed to the graveyard by an entourage in expensive cars.

In traditional belief, to die is to go back home where you belong. Zulu people use the words *ukugoduka* (home going), *ukuya kobabamkhulu* (going to the forefathers), *ukudlula* (pass on), *ukuya kwelamathongo* (ascend to the land of ancestors). These words imply that when one dies one rejoins relatives and friends who have gone before. When departing this world, one needs to return home with respect, dignity and a proper burial. Traditionally, respectable Zulu people were buried at home, behind or at the side of their family huts, while the head of the family was buried at the top of the cattle kraal. Cemetery burials came about only through interventions by missionaries in the nineteenth century.

The Zulu people who moved from rural to urban lifestyles were forced to abandon their traditional ways. They found themselves in an environment that was not conducive to the practice of their culture and religion and, more specifically, their burial customs. Traditional burial practices all but disappeared in cities, although in rural areas these practices are still sometimes observed. In the post-apartheid democratic era there is greater recognition of the wide variety of religious and cultural practices in South Africa and there is a renewed quest, among many traditionalists, to observe and to revive the traditional practices of burials.

Administration of Cemeteries in Urban Areas

The administrators of cemeteries are faced with many challenges, such as grave robbing and vandalising that sometimes occur in urban cemeteries. Traditionally, graves and cemeteries were respected; it was believed that you could not walk about in a graveyard unless evil spirits had brought you there. Respect is of the utmost importance. When Africans bury their loved ones in a grave, they believe that they plant that person (*ukutshala umuntu*). Therefore it is taboo to point at the grave as this shows disrespect; one should rather use a fist instead of a pointing finger. As Pato (1990) reminds us, Xhosas refer to a funeral as *ukufihla* (to hide), as opposed to the disposal of the body. Zulu people also believe that when a person disappears into the earth he or she is in hiding from the living. Respect for the dead applies, of course, to most ethnic groups around the world. Cemeteries are places for long-term memorials and the resting place of human remains, and it is everyone's wish to have a friend or relative rest in peace in a serene, undisturbed environment. However, urban municipalities are faced with a seemingly unsolvable problem: the lack of space, which has resulted in 'crems' and 'cems' as they are commonly known in the death industry. Families sometimes find it extremely hard to secure a grave because the graveyards are full. In the traditional way the dead were buried next to the house or in the cattle kraal. Now it is impossible for township dwellers to bury their dead close to their houses and by-laws would not permit such burials to take place. Even though township people all have connections to their rural origins, it is usually far too expensive to transport bodies there for burial. Choosing the final resting place for deceased family members has become a serious problem for the people of Durban. The high rate of mortality from HIV/AIDS, especially among the youth, the increase in population in urban areas, unemployment and poverty, the high cost of funerals and other related costs, such as hiring buses and catering for mourners, have all exacerbated the problem. Common graves (when members of a family use the same grave by laying bodies on top of one another) are becoming quite common.

Shortage of Land in Urban Areas

Traditionally, there was enough land to bury the dead, and graves marked land ownership when black South Africans did not have the legal documentation to prove ownership of their land. The family graves were evidence of the ownership, and this was a part of the Zulu heritage. But that evidence could be lost due to the policies that led to forced removals. Their relationship with the land is of special importance to the Zulu people. In traditional beliefs and African cosmology, the land belongs to the living, to the unborn and to the dead. Land is an important natural endowment that has no exchange value. In rural areas, the chiefs were custodians of the land and were responsible for allocating it to members of the community. A newcomer in a community would be allocated land without payment but would be expected to serve under the chieftainship of the community. Thus, land was passed down from generation to generation, a practice that has lasted to the present day. A plot of land always belongs to the people who once lived there and may only be transferred with the permission of the local chief. Killen and De Beer (1994: 2) indicate that land is life. Van Niekerk (1994) states that land is security and that the grave is a pathway to the ancestors; therefore, the land where graves are located cannot be used as agricultural land. The belief in ancestral spirits forms the core of the traditional religion of Africans, and that is why a sacred place is desirable, to put the dead to rest with the spirits of their ancestors. Failing to bury the dead with the ancestors might be seen as a disturbance of the dead person who has now become an ancestor. This could easily provoke the anger of the deceased, which may subject the relatives to disciplinary action from the ancestors. In urban areas, friends and relatives of the deceased need graves to be marked so that they are able to visit and communicate with the dead. This raises a question: why do people remember their dead in this way? Among the Zulu people, visiting the grave is an opportunity to contemplate the life they shared with the deceased, and to come to terms with their new life without that person. Visiting the grave is also an opportunity to plead for success and luck. The ancestors are part of reality for African people and occupy centre stage in their lives. It is believed that they sustain and nurture the interests of their descendants and serve as the bridge between the physical and the spiritual worlds (Hofmeyer and Pillay 1994). Zulu people believe that ancestors move between God and the living (Ndwandwe 1982: 22–23), and that when prayers are said the communications of the living do not go to God directly, but *via* the ancestors.

African Beliefs and Philosophy

Africans believe that the ancestors are always there: death is not final. The forefathers' wisdom has always stressed a continuous interaction among humankind. For an individual, the fullness of life is not attainable in isolation from fellow human

beings because life is communal and is possible only in a network of mutual interdependence (Maimela 1985: 66). Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole community, and whatever happens to the community happens to the individual as well. This constitutes the philosophy of *ubuntu*: 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am'. *Umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu* is the significant point in understanding the African view of personhood. There is a chain between the living and the dead that creates continuity and carries forward family traditions. The perception of life as a unity enhances and strengthens the view that it cannot be terminated even by death. Those who have died are seen as having moved on to another world, which is part of the whole reality. To ensure continuity, various ceremonies such as *Ukubuyiswa* are performed with a view to integrating the newly dead into the hierarchy of family spirits (Ngobese 1981: 11). Ukubuyiswa does not involve bringing home the bones of the deceased. Rather it marks the beginning of the period when the deceased 'turns round' (*ukuguquka*) and faces home, and the deceased once again becomes one of its participants. An ancestor as defined by Zahan (1974: 49) is, first of all, a male who has reached a great age and who has acquired, along with longevity, a profound experience of people and things. Ancestors are sometimes called 'the living dead' because it is believed that they are not dead but continue to live in a different state and in another world (Vilakazi 1965: 89). The ancestors expect the living to behave well and abide by the traditional norms of the nation. If the living disobey their ancestors, the ancestors turn their backs on them and they start experiencing bad omens, death and famine. The 'living' are identified through the dead; for example, His Majesty the king of the Zulus is identified through *uShaka kaSenzangakhona* (King Shaka son of Senzangakhona) and there is therefore a connection between the current king and his ancestor. That Africans wish to be identified with their ancestors means that they must be able to point, for future reference, to the grave or the place where their loved ones were buried. Sometimes, however, younger people no longer know where their ancestors lie buried. Then the name of the buried person will be referred to a diviner, who will track down the location. If the attempt fails then the ancestor will be acknowledged through the calling-out of his or her name, to establish the lineage. There is no set limit to how far back in time the link with ancestors may reach.

Common Burial Practices in Rural Areas

When someone dies, the mourners have to cope with the anguish of abandonment and of guilt about much that they have not done or felt in relation to the deceased (Pincus 1974: 42). It is sometimes a relief for family and friends to watch the coffin being lowered into the ground. When, however, a body is cremated, the body is not associated with a special place in the earth where the remains lie. This process does not constitute closure between the living and the dead. The act of cremation, on the other hand, is witnessed by only a few members of the family, if by any at all, and the rest of the mourners proceed to the family home for refreshments. The word

cremation is derived from the Latin *cremo,* to consume by fire. The Greeks introduced cremation to the Western world as early as 1000 B.C.E. The corpses of soldiers who died on foreign battlefields were burned and their ashes returned to their families for burial. The Romans followed the Greek custom, cremating their military heroes. In a cremation there is a false committal in which the coffin disappears from view behind a mechanically controlled curtain. What happens to the ashes is also a mystery to most Zulu families, and often causes confusion and unease amongst the family members. In spite of this, the option of cremation is becoming an alternative for Africans in urban areas because of the shortage of burial space. The ashes are either scattered in the house, or around or over the sea.

Views on Cremation

Some Christians refuse cremation because the body is a gift from God and is believed to be God's temple. Burning of the temple is out of the question. A simple and practical burial was the normal Biblical custom. Genesis 25:9; 35:20 indicates that Jacob was buried in the same grave as Abraham. Genesis 49:29 states: Then he gave them these instructions: 'I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial, place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field'. Abraham's wife, Sarah, his son, Isaac and Rebecca, Isaac's wife, were buried in the same cave. Burning was seen as injury to the dead (Joshua 7: 15). According to the Bible the practice is viewed as a form of humiliation reserved for the worst criminals. Even hanged criminals deserved a decent burial. Jesus Christ was buried and not cremated. The early Christians were mindful of Christ's promise that all in the grave would hear his voice and emerge; the good would rise, while the evil would be condemned (John 5: 28–29). Among Hindus, cremation is conducted on the basis of the belief in a heavenly abode for the spirit of the deceased. Flames are thought to facilitate the ascent of the soul to heaven.

Alternative Burials

Customs and rituals vary between cultures and between religious affiliations within any community. Burials are an attempt to bring closure to the deceased's family and friends, thus lessening the pain. Christian burials observe the ecclesiastical rites of burying the deceased under the ground. Similarly, most Africans, especially the Zulu people of South Africa, believe that burying their loved ones in a grave is the most respectful practice and a gateway to the ancestors.

Burial Methods in Urban Areas

Traditionally, graves and cemeteries were respected; it was believed that you could not walk about in a graveyard unless evil spirits had brought you there. Respect is of the utmost importance. Respect for the dead applies, of course, to most ethnic groups around the world. Cemeteries are places for long-term memorials and the resting place of human remains, and it is everyone's wish to have a friend or relative rest in peace in a serene, undisturbed environment. The City of Cape Town has introduced mausoleums, burial above the ground, as an alternative to traditional graves. This does not use up as much space. The recycling of graves is becoming a norm: after a period of fifteen years remains and headstones are removed from the grave and used for a new burial (Cemeteries and Crematoria Act (1996)). According to a CSIR report of 2008, recycling needs to be considered with other options. It is a short-term solution, which will not hold 20 years from now.

The study conducted by CSIR found that in eThekwini, the minimum new grave space required for 2016 alone is approximately 10,000 graves, equalling 50,000 m^2 or 5 ha for a single year. An equal amount is required for each following year. Families who want to keep their loved ones for longer will have to renew the lease, which has a cost implication. The statistics show that every year 18,000 people are buried by the eThekwini metropolitan. Single burials are no longer an option for the metropolitan and yet most people prefer them.

Choosing the final resting place for deceased family members has become a serious problem in most urban areas. The high rate of mortality from HIV/AIDS (the annual number of deaths rose by 93% between 1997 and 2006), with the province of KwaZulu-Natal experiencing the highest levels in the country, has led to a great number of funerals. Whereas previously funerals would only take place on weekends, since the 1990s many are conducted during the week. Common graves (when members of a family use the same grave by laying bodies on top of one another) are becoming quite common. Second interment extends the lifespan of a cemetery.

Causes of death may affect the manner in which burials take place. People who die in a war or a car accident, who are killed by a weapon such as knife or a gun, who die by drowning, who are struck by lightning or who die by fire are examples of premature deaths. In such a case, the body would not, in the old days, be brought home because it is believed that this would cause the death, in similar circumstances, of another member of the family. The deceased's clothing would be taken to the scene where the accidental death occurred, and traditionally, the grave would be dug next to the scene of the incident. Only the clothes of the deceased would be buried in a case like this. In modern times, however, the body is brought home and kept outside the homestead. If the body is not found, the clothes of the deceased are placed in the house and symbolise his/her actual body. A person whose death is untimely in this way is not mourned, because the cause of death may dwell in the family. If someone dies in water, other members of that family will not be allowed to swim.

Cultural stability gives society its self-image. There have always been tensions between tradition and change, which often lead to creative compromises in many things, including death rituals and practices. Perhaps we should have more faith in our cultural ingenuity. According to Zimon (2005), a corpse is buried without a coffin in some African countries such as Ghana, more especially among the Bichabob, Bimonkopm and Bigbem, trees are planted in the grave, and the wood growing on top of the dead provides oxygen for the living, thus illustrating the fluid and flexible nature of African mortuary customs. This custom indicates that the deceased is alive underground because of the growth of the tree that later provides shade for the grave. The growing of a tree is by choice of the bereaved family and therefore it is a habit rather than a custom.

It is thought that for survivors to continue to see themselves as linked to the deceased, they must reconstruct the image of that person, and in so doing, rethink their own identity. The belief in the influential role played by ancestors is so strong among the Zulu people that even some who ascribe to Christianity still cling to it. It is my view that cemeteries cannot be transformed for alternative burial methods because any envisaged development should be in line with beliefs and cultural importance. An alternative burial method has to observe the dignity of humanity, for both the living and the dead. Introducing new alternative methods or adopting new practices should be considered with caution in South Africa. Our culture is unique to our country and therefore foreign practices may not be relevant to the context of our culture and belief systems unless we want to compromise them for the sake of cultural evolution. In some instances, the body is melted and turned into liquid that could be drained, while any remaining bones could be crushed as in cremation, or buried. It is envisaged that the latter may be explored as an alternative to cremation. Australia has introduced a single-use approach to cemetery design by integrating them with wildlife in parks and nature reserves with burial grounds.

To those who wish to enjoy their cultures and religions freely, as South Africa's Constitution puts it, African peoples will need to accept that the rituals of their cultures have a place in the twenty-first century. This suggests additional principles that concur with traditional Zulu beliefs: if God has created all resources, they should be utilized communally. If people have been created in the image of God, the idea of cremating human bodies is about also cremating God and therefore an insult to the Christian belief of resurrection.

The dead form part of the living and are not forgotten because they take part in the fate of the living. Death rites guarantee protection for the living and proper practices should always be observed to avoid unpleasant consequences for the remaining relatives. Through diviners, the breakdown between the living and the dead is detected and corrected. Diviners possess ancestral spirits and can therefore communicate easily with them through the throwing of bones and other ritual practices. They are mediators between the living and the ancestors, and it is the ancestors who connect the living with the creator (the word 'God' was used as '*Umvelinqangi*' (creator), traditionally and today). Zulu (1998: 187) states:

The ancestors in African society serve as a model of perpetual peace and harmony to be emulated by the living. On another level, they are also simply closer to the community, which qualifies them to become useful intermediaries between people and the spiritual world.

Complexity of Burial Methods

Africans in South Africa are faced with difficult ideological and lifestyle choices. Educated and enlightened Africans emphasise that culture is dynamic, but in adopting Western values, in the name of civilisation, modernity, progress and development, they are also alienating themselves from their traditional norms and values. Conventional burial is still the most common practice for body disposal. Most Africans buy expensive coffins and tombstones as a sign of comfort and consolation for the loss of a loved one.

The African burial rite emphasises the positive experience of remembrance, made tangible by laying the body to rest close to the house. Graves are the soul of every Zulu person. They are places where people go for solace, contemplation and advice when crises arise in life. If someone is cremated, the Zulu people need to perform a cleansing ritual before he or she may be accepted and welcomed into the world of the ancestors. The ritual is conducted to cleanse the deceased person, but it still does not remove the curse of cremation. Since cremation is not welcomed in Zulu culture, it is perceived as punishment to the deceased, punishment associated with hell, where the evil is said to go and be burned. It is part of Zulu cultural belief that the living may connect with the dead when the need arises. It is also the belief that misfortune or famine are caused by the anger of the ancestors.

What Happens at the Graveside

Before the body of the deceased person is taken to the grave it is prepared by the family in the hut and cleansed by observing the rituals for burials. A family member will utter words to bid farewell to the dead person and also introduce him/her to the ancestors of the family. Traditionally, the funeral took place on the day of death, depending on the time because of lack of mortuaries. Now the family keeps the deceased person for a few days before the funeral takes place. Preparations such as choosing a spot for the burial, a coffin, refreshments and transportation of mourners take place during the waiting period, whilst family and relatives gather in the house to mourn. Once a person has been confirmed dead by the doctor, the body is kept in a mortuary until preparations have been concluded, when it is fetched on the evening of the burial. There is a belief among the Zulu people that the body spends the night at his or her house to bid farewell to the family and provide blessings to those remaining behind. This, however, is not practised if a person has died in an accident

or has been wounded by a weapon such as a knife or a gun, because if such a body is kept in the house, then other members of the family might die in a similar way. Among the Zulu people natural death is acceptable as the destiny of every living person whereas accidental death is seen as a curse on the family. The speed of cremation is in contrast to the long process that is followed when an African funeral takes place. The funeral of an adult takes place in the afternoon, that of a child in the morning. The funeral is conducted mainly by males who are blood relatives of the deceased – if it is the head of the house who has died, his adult brothers and adult sons will handle the body throughout the process. The main part of the ceremony takes place at the graveside, which is just below the homestead or in front of the house or, if the head of the family chooses it, the cattle kraal. For the head of the house, a shelter must be dug inside the grave where his body is seated in an upright position. Then the grave is covered. An ox is slaughtered to cover the body of the head of the house, to accompany him back home to his ancestors. He is given some seeds, some eating utensils, blankets, and other useful items to take to the new world. The ancestors will ask for food from the living and if this is not done the family will experience famine. The family will also request good fortune, well-being and wealth from the ancestors on the grounds of good standing with them. The Zulu people believe that the dead have the same desires, such as food and drink, as the living. Close family members will throw sand onto the deceased before the grave is filled. His clothes, one of his best outfits, will also be placed in the grave. Pato (1990) notes that it was customary in the early days to bury the Xhosa in a sitting or standing position, accompanied by weapons, pipes, tobacco, and various other personal items, which they would need in the life after death. Life does not end in a grave but becomes the beginning of a new and eternal life for the individual. Mbiti (1969) writes that a belief in the continuation of life after death for African peoples does not constitute a hope for a future and better life. There is neither paradise to be hoped for nor hell to be feared in the hereafter. For most African people, hell is for witches and evil people who are cut off from the ancestors. If a family member is not present at the burial ceremony, a stone is thrown on the grave. Members of the family not present do likewise when they visit the grave later, as a sign of bidding farewell to the deceased (*Ukuphosa igabade).* There is no time limit to this; it may be done by any family member who comes to the grave for the first time. He or she is taken to the graveside by an elderly family member and mourns as if the burial had happened on that day. The stone is placed on top of the grave, and then it is as if the family member attended the funeral. The body is dressed in ceremonial clothes and placed in an upright position in a coffin with the arms folded upon the chest, and the eyes and mouth are closed. This placement is regarded as a sign of respect and it also allows family and friends, including mourners, to see the deceased during the funeral service. Many African cultures feel that the deceased should be presentable and good looking for a lasting impression on those who are left behind. It may happen that the deceased does not have ceremonial clothes; in such cases the remaining family members will buy new clothes for the deceased. During the burial the immediate family of the deceased stay together on one side of

the grave. If proper funeral rituals, such as the act of sprinkling a few drops of water on the coffin, are not observed, the deceased may come back to haunt the family.

After the funeral, the people move back to the house and observe a cleansing ritual at the gate by washing off the dust of the graveyard before entering the house. The period of mourning starts immediately after the funeral and continues for 3 months. Ceremonies and sporting activities are avoided during this period. Family members are not allowed to shout or to sing loudly in the house. Young men and women are prohibited from engaging in relationships. A black dress is worn by the widow for at least a year and during this period she is not allowed to travel long distances and must avoid meeting other people. She is not allowed to eat certain foods such as sour milk, which was the main meal in the past, because anything that links a person with cattle is not allowed, including entering a cattle kraal. Death among Africans, especially the Zulu people, is communal. Once death has been announced, the family members stay close for at least a week or as long as a few months, to take care of business that the wife or husband may not be able to perform. After the three-month period, the family will slaughter an animal to mark the end of mourning. The family members gather at the house and cleansing takes place in the form of slaughtering a goat (*imbuzi yamakhubalo*) in addition to the animal marking the end of mourning. If the deceased is the head of the house, the wife is expected to mourn for a year before she decides whether she will stay with the family or move on with her life outside the family. If she decides to move on, she does not participate in the eating of meat, as a sign that she wants to be supported by a new family. But if she decides to stay within the family, she will become the responsibility of another member of that family, such as a brother of the deceased. *Ukungena* is a tradition whereby a man takes over the responsibility of looking after his brother's wife and children. This is not, nowadays, imposed on the widow but is her choice, whereas in the old days it was dictated by the family. Although restrictions such as those described here were commonly practised in the old days, they are still found today in some rural areas. The African burial rite emphasises the positive experience of remembrance, made tangible by laying the body to rest close to the house.

An interview with Ntuli (2004) raised the issue of fire and how it relates to African people. Ntuli says that the stem of the word fire in isiZulu is derived from the noun *ukulila* which means to mourn, weep, lament and wail; similarly the expression *ukuya esililweni* means to attend mourning ceremonies. The issue of loss, crying and pain prevents a dead person from returning home to protect the remaining members of that family. The living, dead and yet to be born are joined in a dynamic spiritual union. Berglund (1976) reaffirms the connection between the living and the dead by saying it is customary after a death to talk directly or indirectly to the spirit of the deceased person since it is about to become a Shade, and to remind him/her of their task to watch over and protect the surviving member's lineage members. There may be strained relationships between the Shades and surviving lineage members which must be worked out through various rituals in order for communion to take place. Death rites guarantee protection for the living and proper practices should always be observed to avoid unpleasant consequences for the

remaining relatives. The ancestors in African society serve as a model of perpetual peace and harmony to be emulated by the living (Zulu 1998: 187). On another level they are also simply closer to the community, which qualifies them to become useful intermediaries between people and the spiritual world. Zulu traditions believe that ancestors form a cornerstone for Bantu spirituality. This chapter has explained why burial can no longer take place in urban areas where land can be bought and sold, and new occupants would not tolerate graves on their properties, apart from the fact that the Shade of a deceased person in the yard of the new occupant could be felt to have negative effects on a stranger. The recycling of graves, recently proposed by the City of Durban, is thought to show utter disrespect for the ancestors and for the dead. This deviates sharply from Zulu custom.

Conclusion

Africans believe that there is a holistic relationship between the one creator, *uMvelinqangi*, human beings, and the world. The human relationship with the whole of creation is characterised by mutual respect and interdependence, accentuated by common responsibilities in caring for the world. According to Byaruhanga-Akiiki (http://www.crvp.org/book/series02/II-8 chapter_viii.htm), for centuries Africans have had this vision of a spiritual continuum within which the dead and the living, natural objects, spirits, divinities, the individual, clan and tribe, animals, plants, minerals and humans form an unbroken hierarchical unit of spiritual forces. Although Africans live dual lives among those who have converted to Christianity, death rituals are significant. Shades and ancestral spirits form the basis of African spirituality and also play a pivotal role in the day-to-day life of both traditional and modern Zulu society. The spirits and Shades are inseparable and when a person dies both go underneath to the ancestors.

African culture in the twenty-first century believes that burial forms a significant part of the society and any alternative method needs to be evaluated carefully without compromise to the dignity of humankind. Adoption of foreign methods comes with cost to our culture and must be applied after consultation with the majority of people of South Africa. It is imperative to recognise and respect the religious and cultural requirements of burial practices. Africans, mainly the Zulu people, still have a negative attitude towards any replacement of traditional burial practices in view of cultural evolution. In South Africa, proximate burials of family members have for many centuries been viewed as an indigenous cultural practice. It is a religious belief that *amadlozi* of a deceased family member have been traditionally been buried close to homesteads where relatives lives.

The uniqueness of our Nation and our people is always diverse. Death in African religion is one of the last transitional stages of life requiring passage rites, and this too takes a long time to complete. The deceased must be “detached” from the living and make a smooth transition to the next life and we as the people of the deceased should honour our ancestors accordingly.

References

Berglund, A. (1976). *Zulu thought patterns and symbolism*. London: C Hurst.
Hofmeyer, J. W., & Pillay, G. J. (1994). *A history of Christianity in South Africa* (Vol. 1). Pretoria: Haum Tertiary.
Killen, P. O., & De Beer, J. (1994). *The art of theological reflection*. New York: Crossroad.
Maimela, S. S. (1985). Salvation in African traditional religions. *Missionalia, 13*(2), 63–77.
Mbiti, J. S. (1969). *African religions and philosophy*. London: Heinemann.
Ndwandwe, N. H. (1982). *Are Christianity and Zulu culture mutual exclusive? An investigation into the possibility of indigenisation*. Imbali. Fedsem (unpublished paper).
Ngobese, B. E. (1981). *The role of a priest in African traditional life*. Imbali: Fedsem.
Ntuli, P. (2004). *Interview discussion*. Durban: University of Natal.
Pato, L. (1990). The African independent churches. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, 72*, 24–35.
Pincus, L. (1974). *Death and the family: The importance of mourning*. London: Faber & Faber.
Van Niekerk, A. (1994). *Ubuntu and religion*. Pretoria: Ubuntu School of Philosophy.
Vilakazi, A. (1965). *Zulu transformations*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
Zahan, A. (1974). *The Bambara*. Leiden: EJ Brill.
Zimon, H. (2005). Burial rituals of elderly people among the Konkomba of northern Ghana. *Studies in Cultures and Societies, 20*, 59–75.
Zulu, E. (1998). Reconciliation from an African perspective: An alternative view. *Old Testament Essays, 11*(1), 182–194.

Death in Botswana: Life Among the Ashes

Deborah Durham

Abstract In Botswana, funerals are a primary forum in which people enact core values of caring and love for each other and build mutual connections. These values are significant where people's identities and selfhood are shared across bodies and selves through sentiments and material acts. Love and care are asserted in funerals against suspicions of jealousy and resentment, and increasingly against ideas that modernity has brought new forms of death, alienation from core values, and new forms of self-development that focus on the self and direct offspring. In this context, funerals reassert an idea that has gained strength as a national value since the 1990s: *botho*, a recognition that personhood is recognized in and through others. In the ashes of the firepit left unswept in the space of death and mourning, social life is rebuilt.

At the height of the AIDS epidemic in Botswana, in the early 2000s, cities emptied out on weekends, and even on weekdays offices, schools, and businesses could be short-staffed as people returned to home villages to mourn and bury dead relatives, friends, neighbors, relatives of relatives, friends of friends, family of workmates or colleagues. Up to a third of the population was reported to be HIV-positive, and free antiretrovirals, provided through a partnership between the Botswana government and international NGOs beginning in 2002, only became widely available after 2006. It seemed every family was caring for dying people at home; mortuaries were overfull, and funerals crowded out other activities. Yet there had always been times when people felt there were too many funerals, too many deaths. The cold of winter brought a rash of deaths among the elderly; vehicle accidents seemed to spring up in clusters; and with people's wide networks of relatives and associates, someone was always notifying you of a funeral. Even before the epidemic hit the community in which I did research most intensely, people would sit at funerals and shake their heads and say "we are dying out."

D. Durham (✉)
Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminal Justice Studies, Longwood University, Farmville, VA, USA
e-mail: deborahdurham15@gmail.com

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_9

Well before the AIDS epidemic, various social changes had made death and the funerals that follow it central to life in Botswana. Of course, how people have handled death must have been changing continuously over centuries – we should not assume some fixed set of practices in the past that were disrupted by more recent changes and events. Large-scale migrations of populations in past centuries, consolidation (or weakening) of political centers, wars and famines, colonial and mission-work impacts, and, in the twentieth century, migrant labor taking much of the male population out of the country, all involved new ways to think about and manage death. Death, as anthropologists have noted for a long time, is a challenge to social life and its reproduction (see Bloch and Parry 1982). Not only does it raise questions about enmity, fate, or other causes, it disrupts relationships between people, re-casting them from junior sons or daughters into new seniority. Death dissolves economic partnerships, removing vital links between people and requiring them to re-assign roles, contemplate the nature of ties that bind (or divide) them, and re-define their identities.

In Botswana today, funerals are central in many ways. Funerals bring together in acts of mutual care and cooperation people who have been dispersed across a wide landscape. They are a public forum in which core social values are presented, reconfirmed, disputed, and changed. They are where a person's social being is given final recognition, and social ambiguities are straightened out. Funerals tie together a past and future. Funerals are also messy social events, full of comfort and suspicion, jockeying for position and forging communality, deep sorrow and happy pleasures, boredom and intensity. To understand funerals in Botswana, you need to experience them. There are many aspects to funerals: the care of the dying; the establishment of a space of death in which mourning and consoling take place; the visiting and the long night of the wake; the flurry of activity to prepare for the funeral, burial, and feasting, and the patient process of mourning and forgetting. There is also the seclusion and release of surviving spouses; a death is not an instant, but a long process of varied emotional and physical work. As a step towards learning that experience, I give you some background account of Botswana, and then take you through a death and funeral.

Background: Botswana

People have been living in the territory now known as Botswana for a very long time. Today, people grouped together as Bushmen, San, or Sarwa are identified as the aboriginal inhabitants, and Tswana and other people as having moved into the area in the past several hundred years. Well before the late eighteenth century, Tswana people had moved north into much of what is Botswana today (and many Tswana people stayed south in what is now South Africa), and established what have been called "chiefdoms," "kingdoms," or "polities" dominated by Tswana chiefs, but all incorporating, in different ways, people of different ethnic/linguistic groups, including Kgalagadi, Nama, Yei, Mbukushu, Subiya, Kalanga, and later Xhosa and Herero, among others and including Sarwa. Some of these groups were essentially serfs, others servant class, others lower status citizens, and others incorporated intact

with their own headmen as part of the political structure. Although often spoken of as a "Tswana nation," in fact Botswana remains a multi-ethnic country, with minority groups fighting for cultural rights, but often leaving intact a Tswana cultural hegemony in matters relating to marriage, family law, and death.

Missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century encountered Tswana people for whom death meant a transition to being an ancestor. One's spiritual essence became part of the *badimo* (spiritual powers/ancestors). As Jean Comaroff describes "[*badimo*] had only a collective identity, there being no singular term of address or reference" (Comaroff 1985: 82). As elsewhere in Africa, they continued to monitor and even intervene in the lives of their descendants. Christianization took place unevenly, but accelerated when several of the Tswana rulers adopted different churches for their polities in the later nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century churches had successfully stopped tribal ritual practices in several of the polities and redrew village space, including establishing cemeteries on village margins (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997; Landau 1995; Schapera and Comaroff 1991). Today, most people in Botswana are Christians, some nominal and others fervent, and many expect to lie in their graves until the Second Coming, while at the same time worrying about ancestors and ghosts.

Independence came in 1966; since then, Botswana has been Africa's most stable multi-party democracy. Its agricultural economy, based more in cattle than grains, has been supplemented by its own mines, especially the lucrative diamonds that were revealed in 1967. Revenue from the diamonds has supported the development of schools, health care, and infrastructure, propelling the country from one of the poorest in the world at independence to an upper middle income country in the 2010s, newly immersed in intense consumer practices and entrepreneurialism.

Today, Botswana is a country with rural areas characterized by open compounds of family houses focused around farming and the tempo and concerns of rural life, and also with dynamic cities populated by chic shopping malls and architecturally designed houses behind high walls. Yet these two areas are not disconnected, much as the wealthy and the poor are not. In the past, settlement patterns in the Tswana polities were organized around three areas, with families often having houses in each: one in a central village with a *kgosi* or *kgosana* (Setswana, usually translated as "chief" or "headman"), one in a surrounding belt of agricultural fields, and then one at a more distant cattle post, where cattle, sheep, and goats were tended. The largest villages ran to tens of thousands of inhabitants, while others could be only a dozen or so compounds. People and families moved back and forth between village home, agricultural lands, and cattle posts. Today, that set of living sites also includes the cities and larger towns that grew up in the independence era, where people live for employment, higher education, and the many amenities of city life, including not only the shopping malls, but also the major hospitals.

While the capital city does have a cemetery, it was little used into the 2000s. Most people considered a village to be their home; they were most likely born and raised in a village, and the bulk of their extended families were probably still centered there (Lesetedi 2003; Durham 2010). While increasing albeit still small numbers of people were arranging plots in a city cemetery where they planned

prominent grave markers, at death (and sometimes for death) almost all city residents returned to a village for the extended funeral and burial. And their return in death also brings many others back to the village. The growth in transport, and also of mortuaries makes this all the more possible. Death ensures that the mobility and connections between city and village, village and rural hinterland, remain vibrantly active. It also provides a space where all sorts of issues are raised, renegotiated, and resolved.

Death and the Person

Death rates dropped steadily in Botswana into most of the 1980s, then rose with the spread of HIV/AIDS in the 1990s, and started to decline again after anti-retrovirals (ARVs) began to be made widely available in 2006. The crude mortality rate in 1971 was estimated to be 13.7; it dropped to 11.5 in 1991, to rise to 12.4 in 2001. [The crude death rate is the total number of deaths divided by the total population and multiplied by 100,000.] With ARVs widely available and free to citizens and with sharply declining fertility rates, along with extensive investment in preventive health care with the government's diamond revenues, the crude mortality rate in 2011 had declined to 6.35 (Majelantle 2014: 109), a number lower than for the U.S. in 2016.

Some people die at home; some people die in hospitals. People are intimately familiar with dying and death. Certainly most women in Botswana are familiar with nursing suffering family members through the hardships of old age and young illness (Lindsey et al. 2003; Livingston 2005). Most men will at the very least have been around these practices in the one-room houses that were most people's homes until increasing incomes paid for larger houses for some (not all) in the 2000s. Adults will have visited the ill and dying in hospitals, much more than is generally the case in the West. Julie Livingston's remarkable study of the cancer ward in Princess Marina Hospital in the 2000s (Livingston 2012) depicts a ward where staff work hard, but suffering is great. Space was very limited and many under treatment returned home to be nursed through the vomiting, pain, and disorientation. For those who stay in the hospital, for cancer or car accidents or other illnesses, they expect, during visiting hours, many visitors. Family members may bring food and attend to small nursing duties (complaining of poor treatment by professional nurses all the while), and there are many kiosks and roadside tables selling sweets, drinks, fresh oranges, chips, and other foods to show affection. Those who belong to churches or one of the diverse voluntary associations, ranging from ethnic groups and youth groups to choral societies or neighborhood watches, are likely to be visited by members who come in groups, sometimes in uniform or with a pin or hat marking group membership, and who will sing hymns and other songs, pray, or simply visit and give comfort.

Dying in Botswana is social, wrapped in the networks of kin and others with whom bonds have been forged, in churches, in neighborhoods, at work, and in various public activities. People are connected physically and emotionally. Illness

and dying – as well as health and good fortune – are intersubjective affairs. The interconnection in personhood and being is realized in many ways. As in many places around the world, men and women as they go through life come to be known by names that indicate something one does. Anna becomes MmaPuleng, mother of Puleng, after the birth of her first child, and Tebogo becomes RraPuleng for an acknowledged and supported child. These names are widely used among family, friends, and the community. They co-exist with a given first name used in intimate interactions, nicknames, and with names such as Mrs. Motswakae or the like, used more often in professional work settings. Funerals, as we shall see, confirm the array of nominal relationships developed over a lifetime.

The visits to the ill, the words of comfort and good hope, refer to other ways in which personhood is both social and intersubjective for people in Botswana. Visitors at home or the hospital are a measure of one's dignity. Dignity is an idea conveyed by the term *seriti* or shadow, used in the Tswapong region (Werbner 2018), and also in the idea of *botho*, humanity/personhood, promoted nationally since the 1990s. "No one will come to my funeral," said an impoverished woman in her late 20s, building a mudbrick house by hand in a large semi-urban village in the early 1990s. "They will only serve cabbage." To have many people come to one's funeral indicates the extent of one's influence and recognition. Outside the city, big homesteads, filled with the houses of several adult members, and with women and children ready to welcome visitors and share food and gossip, were the ideal. Women recognize their maturity best when they have a number of juniors and dependents, whom they can call to their side and then send off to do work – cleaning, carrying, and fetching (Durham 2004; Livingston 2005). This was supported not only with generosity and caring spirit but also with wealth of one kind or another. This is sometimes the tea and food offered to visitors, or small gifts of money or materials to family members, with loans of vehicles or animals, or even children, for various needs. To be able to dispense help, in part, indebts the recipients, and keeps them coming back to make returns in one way or another, or to ask for more. Cabbage, cheap and abundant, would bring few to a funeral, the young house-builder suggested cynically, where meat from goats and cattle is the more usual funerary fare.

Wealth brings dangers, too. Jealousy, and the angering of seniors, are dangerous sentiments to arouse, and can cause serious damage, from the physical ailment in the object of jealousy or in his children, to the failure of important endeavors, such as exams, jobs, or in the fields and herds. One woman to whom I gave a gift that delighted her asked that I tell no one else, and said she would conceal it as a gift; she was worried about arousing the jealousy of neighbors and our common acquaintances, whose jealousy might harm her, her children, and her small but important business enterprise. Suffering can be caused by traditional medicines, and also simply by strength of feeling, a strength that grows with age, but also is more powerful in some people than others. A young man of around 30 said one day, following a lively choral concert the night before, that he tried not to feel jealous of a cousin, because his heart had proved dangerously powerful in causing harm in the past. Seniors, whose ill-will can cause ailments diagnosed as *dikgaba* (Lambek and Solway 2001), can easily be affronted when their juniors do not re-invest in the

family, ignore their elders and requirements of family councils, and fail to provide mealie-meal, sugar, or warm blankets. One woman working in the city spoke to me of the difficulty of balancing her sense that she, highly educated and professionally experienced, ought to have some say over how the money she received from burial insurance she subscribed to would be used, against the demands of a family head that it all be handed over to him (and possibly not used for the burial), with the respect that he merited by virtue of seniority. (One term for respect was the same as the word for fear – *tshaba*.)

The inverse of the power of people to cause ill-being (physical ailment, or failure in projects at hand) is the impact of their love and care, something that both I and Frederick Klaits have explored for Botswana in some depth (Durham 2002, 2005, Durham and Klaits 2002, Klaits 2010). This power is an important element in mourning and burial. Much as with causing harm to others, love and care impact others both through direct material items and practices and through the power of sentiment to take form in other people's bodies. Women cook, bathe, and wash and iron clothing for men and others; men provide food, soaps and lotions. Children's labor in the household and for others is fostered as a form of caring for others, a process in maturation as well as obligation. To see someone grow thin, or to ail, is to wonder about the cessation of former sources of love and caring. To see projects fail is to wonder at the enmity or jealousy of others. At funerals, as we shall see, this combination of care, jealousy, and recognition is expressed in many ways. Because these sentiments, the material resources available, and the social and practical lives of people are complicated in many ways, funerals are also a site where "issues" arise (as Koreen Reece (2019) translates the word *dikgang*, in her analysis of the ways kinship is generated through problems and "issues" in Botswana). Because funerals are about unity, the issues call for mutuality and cooperation. Among those issues today is the rapid explosion of material goods.

Coming Together

I have attended many funerals in village Botswana since 1989, with the latest being in 2014. While most of the funerals were for Herero people, part of what is termed a minority group in Botswana, they were similar in overall pattern to the Tswana funerals I also attended and to those described by other authors. I cannot speak about all contemporary funeral practices among all groups in Botswana, but it is worth noting that funerals in practice and principle tend to emphasize unity and mutuality, to involve people from different backgrounds. One of the things many people have found most noteworthy about funerals in Botswana is their "grassroots ecumenicalism," as Richard Werbner (2018) calls it, the participation of people from different churches and even different major religions, people of different ethnic backgrounds, and people from a variety of associations and connections with the deceased and her family, together, typically alternating and sharing major elements of the funerary performance (Durham 2002; Durham and Klaits 2002;

Ngwenya 2002; Werbner 2018). If tensions arise, they are pushed out of the public performance of death, so that each death reassures people of the possibility of "burying each other" and "loving each other" (*oku pakasana* and *oku suverasana*, in Otjiherero).

I like to contrast two moments from 1989 in Mahalapye, a large urban village (now officially a town). One day, walking down to the urban center of the village, my assistant and I came across former schoolfriends of hers, who decided to tell me how Tswana funerals were conducted. Their account was entirely formulaic: first you do this, then this happens, then they do this. My Herero assistant added to the descriptions. They emphasized some things particular to Tswana funerals, marking them as distinct from Herero ones (the hut has a hole knocked in the back and the Tswana widow exits backwards with one shoe on, they said, something I never observed myself in either Tswana or Herero funerals). Because their account closely matched accounts by Isaac Schapera, who had written ethnographies of Tswana life throughout the mid-twentieth century (Schapera 1940; Schapera and Comaroff 1991), I assumed that the neat, formulaic account they gave me was from school texts but also accorded with their own experience. As they were only in their late teens and early 20s, their experience of funerals would have been quite limited: children (up to late teens) did not go to funerals. By contrast with the confident formula they gave me, at the many Herero funerals I participated in (some with joint Herero-Tswana families), there was often an atmosphere of uncertainty about how to proceed. Senior men would debate among each other what happened next, and who and how to do it, as if they couldn't recall and had no set formula. Women were more certain about what they were doing in the mourning hut, or in preparing and serving food and tea. Out of all of this, the general pattern of what was done, in what order, and by whom was also quite consistent, but the impression of well-known formulae emerged only when a printed program was distributed at the day of the burial, for those few funerals that had them in the 1990s. Many funerals had a master of ceremonies who directed people and events on the day of the burial – but again, people often appeared to rely on him and not on their own familiarity with mourning and burial. This contrast between the impression that funerals follow a set pattern, and the impression that they emerge ad hoc around people working to figure out what to do and who is in charge, captures the idea that funerals themselves are an arena in which the past is reworked into new life. It also mirrors the way in which funerals seem to create unity out of an initial diversity, a pulling together in a moment of definition the diverse projects and relationships that might have made up the deceased's life as well as an important confirmation of civic communality.

In the past, people were buried soon after dying, cattle-holding men of some importance in their cattle kraal (corral) and senior women of stature in the area behind the house where they had wielded authority. Children were buried discretely, often inside a hut: men, women, and children were buried in the place that defined their social being (Schapera and Comaroff 1991). Churches and then colonial and independent state government steered people towards cemeteries, and churches started assembling slightly different constituencies around deaths than the ward

residents and kin who would have helped bury the dead in the past. Some groups maintain a separate cemetery. But it was the advent of mortuaries, where bodies could be stored, that people believe most changed how the dead are mourned and buried, as burial can then be deferred until core family members – senior men ("uncles") away at work in industry or offices, women living with children or others in cities, siblings who were staying out at distant cattle posts – came home.

When someone died where I lived in the 1990s, someone from the household notified the ward headman (*kgosana*, lit. "small chief"), and a large metal bar hanging from a tree was struck to announce the death. In other places a bell might have been rung, or word was passed around by those who learned of it. The ringing of the bell set off a flurry of inquiries, and those who knew of the death told others. Indeed, greetings between people routinely asked about the well-being of large numbers of people, and to tell of a death fit neatly within that paradigm of greeting. As in the past, people in the vicinity soon all knew and many would then "visit the death." But news rapidly spread beyond the circuit of ears and legs. The chief's office would forward information so that the death and date of burial would be announced on an evening radio program of death announcements on Radio Botswana, and help contact immediate relatives. In the 1990s, people would make their way to the post office, where pay phones connected them with relatives and others. They called senior male relatives in cities and towns, or village headman's offices to locate close senior kin. Young people called boyfriends and girlfriends, or siblings and cousins. The phone calls took advantage of the deferred burial, which might be put off to the following weekend or the weekend after, and many started with ascertaining when the senior male and other key relatives could make it to the home village of the deceased, to set the date of burial. (In the 1990s, I attended the funeral of a royal family member held mid-week, in an attempt to break the pattern of weekend burials, but weekends remain preferred because of working kin and consociates.) In the twenty-first century, with cellphones widely used, the news goes out more directly to those intimately concerned with the deceased, and to her friends and relatives. While earlier burials brought together people in the ward and neighboring areas, burials since the advent of mortuaries and new forms of long-distance communication reach out to a more dispersed community of concern for the dead, called back to the village.

Throughout the week, or weeks, preceding the burial, people come to "greet the death" and to participate in mourning and prayer. "The death" becomes a space in itself; as people enter the compound in which the house of the deceased is located, they must dress respectfully – women wear a shawl, sweater or jacket, and most cover their hair with a scarf or headgear, and men adjust their demeanor and clothing. The fire around which men sit never has its ashes cleaned during the period of "the death" and the primary mourner remains unbathed, mostly lying under blankets on the floor, unusual states in a country where people often bathe twice a day (Durham 2005) and a swept yard and polished house were signs of moral worth. At a Herero funeral, women stay with the primary (female) mourner in her room/house, and sing songs about loss – their own losses, sometimes of livestock, sometimes of people, blending with the loss of the deceased, creating a community of

sorrow. People who come to greet the death may pop their heads in, or step inside, to greet the mourners. Some, especially women, will sit with the mourners and, if skilled and mature, may join the sporadic singing (sometimes called 'wailing' in literature). But the women also chat, gossip, and even tell funny stories of things going on at work or in the neighborhood. Their job is to assist the primary mourner, both to mourn, but also to not sink into herself, isolated in her sorrow. They prompt her to greet visitors and ask questions about their families or friends and to make sure she gets tea and food when it is served outside.

Outside the mourning house, men and others gather especially in the evenings, as people return from work or are relieved of household demands by older children returning from school. At dusk, people gather around the door to the house, and prayers and short sermons are said and hymns sung. Before or after, women will prepare and serve tea and, if they have the resources, bread or fatcakes, the equivalent of an evening meal in the village, where heavy eating takes place midday. Visitors may sit and talk around the fire or in chairs in the house's courtyard, or drift off home. Before people got cellphones, and before electricity became more widely available in the 2000s, people came often to visit the death, to see people they didn't often see, to talk about what was going on in the lives of absent relatives or friends, or to find out about stray cattle, and to tell stories and simply chat. But people also come to greet the death and offer prayers in the evening because that is the work of death.

The Work of Death

A death is work, and work in a household is one of the fundamental ways in which people demonstrate care and love for each other. Although anthropologists in the twentieth century observed a distinction among Tswana people between "to work for others" (*go bereka*, Setswana derived from Afrikaans) and "to work with the outcome of self-making" (*go tiro*, Setswana) (see Alverson 1978; Comaroff and Comaroff 1987), in the work of funerals the two come together. People work to create the final identity of the deceased and also to fashion their own relationship to the deceased and his family. "Let us bury each other, people!" (*ngatu pakasaneye ovandu*, in Otjiherero) was a frequent exhortation at the burials of Herero I attended, typically urging participants to come closer together in the final acts of burial around the grave. Using the reciprocal verb ending, *–sana,* emphasized the reciprocal self-making in which making oneself involved making others.

At a death, senior men organize the transportation of the body to a mortuary, and rapidly go to work preparing for the period of mourning and burial, especially the large amounts of food, firewood, cooking and serving utensils, tents, lighting, and chairs that will be needed to feed and accommodate visitors and mourners, along with arranging church, burial, and other services (see for an example of how such expense demonstrates care, Colman 2013). Women organize to help with the cooking, serving, and washing up, and complain about those who don't do their share.

Both sets of labor are often organized with the help of a burial society the deceased or her family has joined, or with other associations – a women's church group, a local choral club, or an ethnic association. But these forms of work are only part of what is recognized as work at a death – the praying, the sitting with mourners, the songs and hymns, and attendance at the all-night wake and funeral itself are considered forms of work, which link the workers and the dead in acts of care. It is important to direct these in positive ways, especially in the context of death, which might be, and is often suspected to be, the outcome of negative sentiments and evil actions (see Klaits 2005). "Why do you go to all these funerals," the Herero chief in Mahalapye asked me once, "you don't kill people." Work, which includes going to funerals, demonstrates loving care, even among those who might be jealous or resentful of the dead.

"Oh, people will talk about me," said an urban worker who had decided not to return to her home village for the funeral of a neighbor there. If people did complain about her, I didn't hear it at the death itself (though people do note absences, and they may have complained at home or in street gossip), but what people did note was how much those who attended "loved people." Countering the jealousy, spite, justified anger, greed, and selfishness that were understood to be rampant and to cause harm, funerals were promoted as sites of positive support. The night before the burial, people gather for an all-night wake. Throughout the night, they sing hymns and preach or listen to others preach about the power of goodness and God, and the dangers of negative sentiment and bad deeds. In the very wee hours, women and youth serve fatcakes and tea, which women have made throughout the night around a separate fire, tossing balls of dough into sizzling oil and steeping buckets of tea with plenty of rich milk. Meanwhile the hymn-singers sitting in the ranks of borrowed or rented chairs lean against each other, whisper or talk to friends they haven't seen for ages, share hymn books, and occasionally laugh quietly at the exaggerated preaching of a young man or woman, or frown at the grandstanding of another, interrupting him constantly with hymns started from the audience.

At dawn, while young men go off to dig the grave (if it hadn't been dug the evening before), others go back to their homes to check on and feed children and others who stayed at home. There, they bathe, often in groups sharing a washtub or (increasingly frequent nowadays) bathroom, and dress, attending carefully to hair, makeup, and costume. Some Tswana church groups expect sober dress, but others, and Herero funerals especially, expect people to be dressed in their brightest, finest clothes, faces well made up, hair as beautifully arranged as can be. Such dress establishes the well-being of those at the funeral, and counters suspicions of negative sentiment. Dressing well not only establishes one's own sources of well-being (income, boyfriends or husbands, access to fabric or dress markets, and industriousness in cleaning and ironing, things very important and remarked upon during events), it also conveys positive feelings in others, who feel better for seeing fine dress (see Durham 1999). People frequently comment to each other how beautiful they have become at funerals. Younger people, especially, know that they are presenting themselves to potential lovers and spouses, and a quiet flirtation is easily observed. Promoting such good feelings helps people forget the sadness of death

and helps them forget destructive grief and sad memories, which is an important part of funerals (Klaits 2010).

Other people will dress in uniforms of voluntary associations they belonged to along with the deceased. Some of these are churches, whose members may agree to wear their church uniforms or the women's group uniforms. Many, however, will be associations that either are burial societies, or have burial societies associated with them, such as churches, ethnic associations, or youth groups, and in the twenty-first century some businesses. These are important financial supports for the costs of returning bodies from workplaces or other places of death, and the expenses of funerals and burial. Burial societies have a long presence in Botswana (Grant 1987; Ngwenya 2002); after a typically small joining fee, members contribute periodic dues and, at the death of a member or part of a member's family, make a somewhat larger contribution to the costs of the funeral. Members may be fined by society "police" for not wearing uniforms at the appropriate time, or in disarray, or being observed engaging in disapproved-of behavior such as drinking or smoking. The circle of family members covered by a burial society has been steadily contracting since the 1990s, with the advent of AIDS and also increasing funeral costs as people want more expensive coffins, chairs and tents, and hearses and graveside appurtenances. Societies regularly re-write their constitutions to specify who will be covered in a member's family, and to what amount, as different categories of kin receive different amounts of financial help. The uniforms, of burial societies and many other voluntary associations, are important ways in which people connect with one another in the processes through which uniforms are adopted and made (Durham 1999; Ngwenya 2002). At many funerals, people in uniforms, and also sometimes members of associations shared with the deceased that do not have uniforms, stand guard around the coffin during ceremonies. They may drape a uniform over the coffin, to be switched to other uniforms, as the guards change, and they carry the coffin, and do some of the work of cooking, serving, and cleaning dishes, on behalf of the deceased.

At the funeral itself, held the day after the wake, people gather at the house of the deceased, where some may view the deceased ("to be sure they are dead," said one person when I asked, "it's hard to believe someone is dead," she said). A master of ceremonies directs the funeral. A printed program (for those who can afford it) lists his name, those of the coffin-bearers, speakers at the ceremony, and officiating ministers, along with a photograph and short biography of the deceased. People sit, often under an open tent rented for the occasion, and a series of speakers and preachers addresses them. The preachers may come from different churches – certainly that to which the deceased belonged, but also churches of relatives, and very commonly other churches from the neighborhood. Richard Werbner (2018) points out the unusual nature of this "grassroots religious ecumenism" with churches cooperating at funerals. The master of ceremonies or a relative will read messages sent by relatives who cannot attend, making them present in the community formed around the death, voicing their love and care and concern, and assuring people they had no bad feelings toward the deceased that might have harmed her. Other relatives, and occasionally the heads of societies to which the deceased belonged, will speak.

They usually speak of the progress of the illness which led to the death, recounting their visits, and the efforts to cure or comfort the deceased.. A senior relative, and perhaps others, will give an account of the deceased's life – an important moment, in which the identity of the deceased and his relationships with others is established. This is important, in that often relationships throughout life are subject to redefinition, including parentage. Were parents married, had a biological father acknowledged the deceased, had the deceased children that were his or had gone unacknowledged or unsupported, was a marriage a marriage or concubinage (the words used for a spouse during life would be the same), were siblings recognized or not. In Botswana these relationships are all subject to challenge and redefinition in the course of a lifetime, and the funeral makes a final public statement about who a person was through the sets of relationships that define him. It is not surprising, then, to hear of fierce legal battles over the right to bury a woman, or a deceased child, by two sides that differ as to whether a marriage was a marriage or not, or a child had been adequately acknowledged by a father or not.

Humming a hymn used at all funerals, people gather around the coffin as it is loaded into the back of a pickup truck or into a hearse, where the closest relatives gather around it. Some scatter to get a lift to the cemetery, while others will have to walk to the burial. All mourners, though, are urged to gather closely around the coffin as it is moved into the vehicle, and from the vehicle through the cemetery, and finally as it is buried in the ground. "Let us bury each other, people," repeats the master of ceremonies, urging people closer and closer. Prayers, sometimes by the different churches participating, and hymns take place, and people cast dirt upon the coffin in the grave, women with handfuls on one side and men by shovelfuls on the other. People line up to do so, and there may be jostling as the closest relatives go first. On the women's side, women sometimes put themselves among the distant relatives and cause a fuss from others who dispute their presence in that group. Strong demonstration of emotion is discouraged and if someone starts crying, others will gather around and pat her chest and back, stroke her arms, and encourage her to forget her sorrow (see Klaits 2010). Meanwhile, though, while some gather tightly around the grave, others hold back and observe each others' clothing, gossip about each other, subtly catch the eye of a boyfriend, or sit down in the shade, overwhelmed by the heat of the sun. It is both a death, and a vivid moment of on-going sociality.

Returning to the compound, after a symbolic washing off of the dangers of the graveyard with buckets at the gate (at some but not all funerals), a feast is served to people as they sit around in chairs. As at the edge of the grave, where closest relatives threw dirt in first, there is an order: the primary mourners are served first but not in a marked way, then more markedly elders and elderly and people recognized as distinguished in some way, and then the rest. It is for this food that many said people came to funerals, a claim that was both ironic and suspicious, meant to be humorous but also suggesting the hidden presence of ill-will or simple greed, and also indicating the social divisions of wealth in a country long associated with income inequality, whether in cattle or in currency. In the 1990s, people in the urban village I lived in were eager for the huge mound of shredded beef or goat that was

served along with a starch (sorghum or maize porridge, hominy, or for those who could afford it, rice). Old women, who were often short on food at home, would take the meat from my plate (too much for me to eat) and eat it or tuck it into a plastic bag to bring home. People ate, chatted amongst themselves, and drifted off to their homes.

The compound of death, however, remained a mourning site for a period that varied considerably. Important events followed after a few days, a week or two, and then months and years later, according to ability and other demands. These included the distribution of the clothing of the deceased and allocation by senior family members of the deceased's belongings; the sweeping of the yard, cleaning of the house, and sweeping up and removing the ashes that had built up in the fire around which men (mostly) gathered. There was also the release of the primary mourning woman from the house with the sacrifice of a beast and, a year or more later, if she is a widow, release from the set of strictures associated with her "pollution" by the death of her husband. These limitations typically include prohibitions on sexual intercourse and restrictions on movement, such as vigorous movement or upright demeanor. Some churches expect the widow to dress in subdued colors, or a specific color (blue) for the rest of her life, or to wear a ribbon or armband indicating her condition (Klaits 2005). Some widowers will also wear a band or ribbon. Perhaps years later there will also be the erection of some kind of marker for the grave. Over time, relatives will infrequently stop by the grave, perhaps when attending another funeral, or visiting the village from afar, and verbally greet the deceased or communicate memory and respect by leaving a small stone or twig on the graveside. By and large, the death has gone from a matter of broad community concern and involvement to one addressing the narrower set of kin around the deceased.

Life Among the Ashes

In 1989, when I started field research, when a hearse or (more commonly) a pickup truck with a coffin in it passed us in the large urban village of 30,000, walkers stopped and stood respectfully and many knelt for the passing death, while most cars stopped and pulled over. In my first visit to the country in 1986, in the capital city, some but not all offered such respect to the passing dead. During my later visits, in the 2010s, I saw no such thing: no one stopped, much less kneeled. Many things might account for the change. Certainly the frequency of deaths at the height of the AIDS crisis had an impact, with so many deaths, so many funerals. Mieka Ritsema (2008), working in the capital city, found that many people blamed "modernity" for both the AIDS deaths and a perceived increase in vehicular deaths. Modernity both encompasses the rapid increase in car traffic now clogging the roads around the country and suggests new forms of sociality and community. Village living is certainly different from urban life. The forms of connections are both persistent, but changed in their geographies; in villages, people worried about raising the jealousy or overt animosity of those around them. In cities, one might not even

know one's neighbors, and fear of strangers – thieves and petty violence – pervades urban life. The villagers' frequent encounters, exchanges of words and things, opened up the channels of sentiment and material exchange that shaped the well-being of each. In cities, these channels are weakened, witnessed by the fact that people don't hesitate to flaunt wealth, do not greet each passer-by, and openly disrespect the elderly in public. The presence of new technologies of communication (cellphones and internet) consolidates circles of compassion among those one actually knows, and although communication is more frequent, people are also dispersed and substitute WhatsApp for the intimacy of work.

Other changes, too, are notable. Children now occasionally attend funerals – though their presence generates complaints. In the 1980s and 1990s, funerals were the work of the mature, those old enough to manage sentiments and to be forging relationships with people outside their domestic circle. I watched a pair of older teenagers, around 17 or 19, teased mercilessly by women in their 30s when they proudly dressed in borrowed finest and attended a neighbor's funeral. At that age, they were just children, still socially oriented towards their households, unable to contain or direct their own emotions and needing to be compelled through constant nagging to work for others. Although one might worry that children were vulnerable to the pollution of death, people were more concerned that children, even older ones, were incapable of the sentimental work of funerals.

In the early 1990s, it was a shocking thing to the village when a family held a funeral for the public to attend, complete with chairs and prayers and food, for a child of under 10 who had died. They were just displaying wealth, I was told, inappropriately. Small children were buried without public ceremony, though the profound grief of the parents was visible and shared. In the twenty-first century, the place of children in a family has changed, at least for a segment of the population. As predicted by demographers, along with urbanization, increasing women's education and employment, and increasing wealth, women are having fewer children. New forms of middle-class family life pour resources into their children, sending them to private English-speaking kindergartens (creches) or private schools, hiring tutors, paying for extramural activities and experiences, and investing in clothing and outfitting them in display-oriented ways. No longer are parents concerned that children spend their days playing and not working and caring for the family. Parents now see children as investments for their own labor, displays of their own love and care. This new role of children – who might now be seen at funerals and be the occasion for them – suggests a narrowing and focusing of care, and a consolidation of wealth which might have been dispersed more widely in past days. In this context, many doubt the strength of "our [Tswana] culture" and suggest Christian values should supplant Tswana ones in the care of orphans of the AIDS epidemic (Dahl 2009).

Countering this sense of alienation in the cities and towns, new geographies of sentiment, and the shrinking of broad social commitment, death and funerals do emphasize the connections between people, their mutuality in practice and sentiment. The tensions of everyday life, however, are also evident in funerals. The problem of food and expenses on chairs and amenities is one arena where a tension

between personal display and concern for the welfare of others is seen. We see it, too, in the singing and preaching that are so important to dying and burial. At Herero funerals, the mourning songs sung by women in the house speak of personal histories – cattle lost, relatives gone, homesteads abandoned. Yet the sadness of which the women sing merges together with that of the primary mourner, uniting them in sorrow, most emphatically as they join together in a chorus whose words are solely "wei wei wei, o wei wei wei." The hymns sung over the night of the wake, and especially at the funeral and graveside, are familiar ones to most participants. Tensions can arise, however, as people join them in their different home languages. Preaching alternates with singing during a wake to remind people of their common fate, but some preachers begin to sound too much like they enjoy the endless and loud sound of their own voice, and may refer to sins identified with specific listeners. These preachers are silenced by repeated interruptions with hymns, or muttered discontent, until another person displaces them, to speak again about lives in common.

Since the 1990s, the Botswana government has been promoting the concept of *botho,* which might be translated as "humanity," but which has a broader local meaning of recognizing that one's own personhood is rooted in that of others (Matambo 2015). The term has become popular. Funerals seem to be the epitome of *botho*, recognizing the personhood of others and its construction through positive sentimental exchanges. So too, however, are orientations criticized as problems for society. One is the on-going suspicion of jealousy and animosity causing harm to others, a suspicion lurking behind the visits, the well-wishing, and the sideways glances and complaints about laziness and unwillingness to work. Another is the tension between a kind of selfishness that promotes the self without connecting it to others through acts of care. I think of some negative comments about a woman exceptionally finely dressed, quite beautiful in her plump countenance and gorgeous fabric and tailoring – instead of being dressed to give pleasure to others, her critics felt she was showing off the gifts she received from (plural) boyfriends.

The tension between a self-focused form of self-development, and one that connects one's well-being with that of others, is an old one in Botswana (see, for example, Alverson 1978), and this tension presents itself in new forms today. Advertisements for burial insurance from banks give individuals security (including from obligations to contribute to close relatives' funerals), but do not foster wider reciprocal care through visiting, work, and dress of older burial societies. Employment in towns has supported more independent households, which hire contract labor for their needs instead of calling on poorer relations and dependents for chores in the household and at agricultural and pastoral holdings in return for food and shelter. Although weddings are becoming the primary site for display of personal wealth, with a restricted guest list, rented venues and catering (Solway 2016; van Dijk 2012), funerals, too, support display of individualized accomplishment. One sees this in the cost of the coffin, the elaborateness of the metal fencing around a grave, the poshness of a hearse instead of a pickup, and the tents, chairs, and, occasionally, the display of children who recite, at a very upper class funeral, a small personal memory of a grandfather in careful clipped English.

Yet, amidst the growth of consumerism, of deepening investment in a nuclear family, of fears that dangers center on thieves or economic opportunities instead of jealous neighbors and resentful kin, of a modernity that seems to bring more and more death, it is funerals most of all that demonstrate the values of *botho*. These include respect for others shown in acts of care and caring, acknowledging the widest of social connections, and the value of persons whose personhood is made through social relationships. Funerals are open to all, work is invited from all, and everyone is able to develop their own *botho* in the space of death.

References

Alverson, H. (1978). *Mind in the heart of darkness: Value and self-identity among the Tswana of southern Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bloch, M., & Parry, J. (Eds.). (1982). *Death and the regeneration of life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Colman, J. (2013). *Making social relations and identities through consumption: A Botswana case study*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of East Anglia, School of International Development.

Comaroff, J. (1985). *Body of power, spirit of resistance: The culture and history of a South African people*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Comaroff, J. L., & Comaroff, J. (1987). The madman and the migrant: Work and labor in the historical consciousness of a South African people. *American Ethnologist, 14*(2), 191–209.

Comaroff, J., & Comaroff, J. L. (1991). *Of revelation and revolution: Volume 1. Christianity, colonialism, and consciousness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Comaroff, J. L., & Comaroff, J. (1997). *Of revelation and revolution: Volume 2. The dialectics of modernity on a South African frontier*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dahl, B. (2009). The "failures of culture": Christianity, kinship, and moral discourses about orphans during Botswana's AIDS crisis. *Africa Today, 56*(1), 22–43.

Durham, D. (1999). The predicament of dress: Polyvalency and the ironies of a cultural identity. *American Ethnologist, 26*(2), 389–411.

Durham, D. (2002). Love and jealousy in the space of death. *Ethnos, 67*(2), 155–180.

Durham, D. (2004). Disappearing youth: Youth as a social shifter in Botswana. *American Ethnologist, 31*(4), 589–605.

Durham, D. (2005). Did you bathe this morning? Baths and morality in Botswana. In A. Masquelier (Ed.), *Dirt, undress, and difference: Critical perspectives on the body's surface* (pp. 190–212). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Durham, D. (2010). The village as frontier in Africa. In D. Mines & N. Yazgi (Eds.), *Village matters: Relocating villages in the contemporary anthropology of India* (pp. 290–314). New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Durham, D., & Klaits, F. (2002). Funerals and the public space of mutuality in Botswana. *Journal of Southern African Studies, 28*(4), 777–795.

Grant, S. (1987). Death and burial in Mochudi: A study of changing traditions. *Botswana Notes and Records, 19*, 137–149.

Klaits, F. (2005). The widow in blue: Blood and the morality of remembering in Botswana's time of AIDS. *Africa, 75*(1), 46–62.

Klaits, F. (2010). *Death in a church of life: Moral passion during Botswana's time of AIDS*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lambek, M., & Solway, J. (2001). Just anger: Scenarios of indignation in Botswana and Madagascar. *Ethnos, 661*(1), 49–72.

Landau, P. (1995). *The realm of the word: Language, gender, and Christianity in a southern African kingdom*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
Lesetedi, G. (2003). Urban-rural linkages as an urban survival strategy among urban dwellers in Botswana: The case of Broadhurst residents. *Journal of Political Ecology, 10*, 37–46.
Lindsey, E., Hirschfeld, M., & Tlou, S. (2003). Home-based care in Botswana: Experiences of older women and young girls. *Health Care for Women International, 24*(6), 486–501.
Livingston, J. (2005). *Debility and the moral imagination in Botswana*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Livingston, J. (2012). *Improvising medicine: An African oncology ward in an emerging cancer epidemic*. Durham: Duke University Press.
Majelantle, R. (2014). Adult mortality levels and trends in Botswana. In *Government of Botswana (Statistics Botswana), population and housing census 2011: Analytical report* (pp. 109–144). Gaborone: Statistics Botswana.
Matambo, S. (2015). 'Botho': The bedrock of Botswana's being. *Diplomat Magazine*, 4 January 2015. http://www.diplomatmagazine.nl/2015/01/04/15776/. Read on-line August 15, 2018.
Ngwenya, B. (2002). Gender, dress, and self-empowerment: Women and burial societies in Botswana. *African Sociological Review, 6*(2), 1–27.
Reece, K. (2019). 'We are seeing things': Recognition, risk, and reproducing kinship in Botswana's time of AIDS. *Africa* 89(1), 40-60.
Ritsema, M. (2008). Gaborone is growing like a baby: Life expectancies and death expectations in urban Botswana. *Africa Development, 33*(3), 81–108.
Schapera, I. (1940). *Married life in an African tribe*. London: Faber.
Schapera, I., & Comaroff, J. L. (1991). *The Tswana. Revised edition*. London: Kegan Paul International.
Solway, J. (2016). "Slow marriage," "fast *bogadi*": Change and continuity in marriage in Botswana. *Anthropology Southern Africa, 39*(4), 309–322.
van Dijk, R. (2012). The social cocktail: Weddings and the innovative mixing of competencies in Botswana. In J.-B. Gewald, A. Leliveld, & I. Peša (Eds.), *Transforming innovations in Africa: Explorative studies on appropriation in African societies* (pp. 191–208). Leiden: Brill.
Werbner, R. (2018). Botswana's ecumenical funerals in the making. *Journal of Southern African Studies, 44*(2), 315–329.

Ancestors and Death: From West Africa to Southwest Europe

Clara Saraiva

Abstract The conception of ancestors is of the utmost importance in African death. But becoming an ancestor implies strict requirements and the performance of specific ceremonies. What happens when someone with the potential to become an ancestor dies as a migrant, far from the home grounds? In this text, we will follow the process of creating an ancestor through a voyage from Guinea-Bissau to Portugal and back to the original grounds. We will see how transnationalism, the circulation of material goods, bodies and spirits work to re-create identities that connect the life and death of African migrants in the contemporary world.

Keywords Death · Ancestor · Good death · Transnationalism · Circulation · Guinea-Bissau

Making Ancestors: Old and New Ways

In Africa, the idea of "good death"is not separated from the notion of ancestor; the ideal situation is for the spirit of the dead to become an ancestor, although this usually is the case only for the most illustrious deceased. The ancestors become key players that influence the life of survivors. Death is conceptualized beyond the limits of individual death and is inscribed in a circular, repetitive time, codified by myths and controlled by the ancestors, whose representatives in the earthly world are the patriarchs. They are already imbued with deep ancestral knowledge and are very close to the well-deserved passage into the beyond (Kopytoff 1971; Thomas 1994). In a way, a respected and prestigious elder is the promise of a potential protective ancestor, once his/her passage to the other world takes place. But to make sure one becomes an ancestor the living ones have to assure that all ceremonies are correctly performed (Saraiva 2016).

C. Saraiva (✉)
Center for Comparative Studies (CEC), University of Lisbon-FLUL, Lisbon, Portugal
e-mail: maria-saraiva@campus.ul.pt

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_10

In addition to the specific rituals and materials of each moment of the funeral ceremonial complex, African mythologies enshrine the ideal of good death linked to the relation between the two universes, in which death is considered only a passage from one to the other—the world of the living and the world of the dead.

Historical descriptions of death rituals all over Africa are full of sumptuous ethnographic details, with highly elaborated and lavish ceremonies. Many of them concern the preparation of the body to be ready to be exposed or given a destiny—temporary or final—and prepare the journey of the spirit to the world beyond. Cavazzi's descriptions of sixteenth century West Africa mention how, on the Gold Coast (Ghana), the mourners sprinkled the corpse with ash and dust from bark and stroked their faces with raffia or straw threads (Dias 1992: 196). Cavazzi (1965: 100) also reports how, in the Kingdom of the Congo, Duchy of Sundi, the body was carried to the forest, anointed with palm oil and dusted with *tacula* (*Pterocarpus tintorius Welw*). Among the Haossas, Igaras, and Djokons in Central Sudan, the king's body was smoked and embalmed (Baumann and Westermann 1970: 329). Even descriptions form the twentieth century among the Quibalas of Angola (Rodrigues 1968) portray how the *soba* (local chief) was, after death, seated and attached to a chair, his pharynx was cut so that the boiling palm oil could be poured, destroying the bowels and causing the drying out of the corpse. After a few months, when it was already dry, they wrapped the corpse in cowhide and built the grave where the dead man sat in his chair. The sexual organs of the important sobas were treated with the same oil and put into a box; the intestines were buried separately, near the residence of the deceased.

Another major theme on death in Africa is the extravagant expense of funerals, not only of the rich and powerful, but also of ordinary people. In nineteenth century Yorubaland, Peel describes how people went into debt due to outrageous funeral expenses (Peel 2003: 60–62). Cavazzi's accounts (1965, 124) show how in seventeenth century Congo it was extremely important to dress the dead well, and how this custom aroused the following comments from Christian missionaries:

> … the conquests are careless in their garments and walk almost naked; but they wrap their corpses with thick cloths of the region. They deem this honor so necessary that all those to whom poverty does not allow so much expense, deferring the natural modesty of begging, travel the paths asking for cloths. And, lacking this resource, they dare to ask the governor and the king himself …

Although such descriptions discuss the death of prestigious persons which impressed observers and writers for long centuries of colonial ruling, we can see how the concerns with a decent burial and accomplishment of the proper rituals were part of everyone's concerns. These concerns show how badly individuals strived to be remembered after death, a necessary condition to eventually become an ancestor. Beyond these material actions, it is important to reflect upon the conceptualization and worldviews that surround death.

The continent has changed and today "African death ways" concern present day phenomena, which come out of an on-going mixture between tradition and modernity. I will here borrow some of the vignettes present in an introductory chapter by Michael Jindra and Joel Noret's in their book on funerals in Africa (Jindra and Noret 2011), where they bring up some of the features that are present in contemporary Africa, that relate directly to the theme of funerary rituals and conceptions of death.

The first one is the importance of the remolding of hierarchies and of urban-rural relations in a post-colonial setting. Traditional hierarchies in African societies—such as chiefs, elders, and secret societies—that often controlled public events (as funerary ones), lost power and were replaced by alternative ones (colonial, religious, or state), over centuries of colonization, followed by independence. These authors stress the fact that increased urbanization also changed urban-rural relations, and that conversions to world religions also meant "conversions to modernities" (Van der Veer 1996), and embracing new life styles, often more westernized. All this has implications in the way death is perceived and enacted today.

Related to such changes come issues of gender and tensions between different generations; the role of mortuary associations; the technological changes and the new material culture of death; the role of pandemics—such as AIDS and Ebola—and their aftermaths, and the declining fear of pollution.

I would add to these the importance of present-day mobility and circulation of individuals and families between Africa and the Western world, and the changes that such mobilities imply in African death. All these aspects are related to one another. For instance, the role of associations that often act both at home and abroad, helping their members with either bringing the corpse home or providing a decent funeral in the diaspora, is connected with technological changes and the new material culture of death. This is a new perception of death that has lost its mere local focus to become globalized. African migrants abroad use the Internet and mobile phones to communicate and organize rituals that often take place both where the death occurs (abroad) and in their place of origin, thus maintaining, through death, a liaison to the living that stayed home. Modern mortuaries that exist in some parts of Africa allow for delayed funerals, waiting for relatives to arrive from all over. But, most of all, international migration means that migrants contribute to their home economy in several significant ways. Funerals are one of the most important and visible parts of such contributions, which bring status and prestige, but also anxiety and tension, as we shall see.

In this chapter, I will draw on a case study from Guinea-Bissau to analyze some of the implications of the transnational lives of Africans, and, most of all, of their also transnational deaths. We will see how the process of creating an ancestor is built when one's life and death is split between two continents. The material used in this text was gathered in field work both in Guinea-Bissau and Portugal. I followed the secondary death rituals of a Guinean woman immigrant in Portugal. This woman was a well-known *djambakóss* (religious officiant) and her death meant that creation of a potential ancestor was underway. For that to happen, material and symbolic bridges had to be created between West Africa and Southwest Europe.

In Guinea-Bissau and Abroad: Re-making Identities

Guinea-Bissau is a small country in West Africa, beneath Senegal and Guinea-Conackry, with ca. 1.2 million inhabitants, but with a large ethnic diversity, including more than twenty three ethnic groups (Einarsdottir 2000). The landscape is marked by numerous large and smaller rivers, and people use their water for rice plantations. Most groups in the interior are Islamized, and the coastal ones are animistic; the influence of Catholicism brought by the Portuguese colonizers exists but often mingles with the traditional ways. In the last decades the influence of Pentecostal churches, much stricter in challenging ethnic traditions, has increased. Still, religious affiliation does not always follow an ethnic division (Jao 1995), and there are multiple combinations of animistic, Islamic and Christian religious options.

Due to its endemic poverty and also political and social instability, Guinea-Bissau exports many migrants. There are Guineans scattered throughout Senegal, France, and the Netherlands (Machado 2002). Portugal soon became a preferential destination, due to the ties connecting the two countries—Guinea-Bissau was a former Portuguese colony and the official language is Portuguese. The emigration to Portugal started after the 25th April 1974 Portuguese revolution (which ended Salazar's fascist and colonial dictatorship) and the independence of Guinea-Bissau. It was mainly after 1984, with the opening of the country to more westernized economic and social models (Machado 2002; Saraiva 2008; Quintino 2004), that emigration increased. Portugal is still conceptualized as a paradise, where one can have a proper job and send remittances to the families back home, thus becoming a major contributor to the family's well-being in Guinea-Bissau (Saraiva 2008: 256).

In Portugal, almost all the African groups are represented, and there is a certain union and revindication of a common national origin that surpasses ethnic diversity (Bordonaro and Pussetti 2006: 133, Saraiva 2008: 257). National identity is recreated in the diaspora though a re-elaboration of references and codes that connect individuals to their original grounds. One of such references is related to death and the funerary rituals, which are in turn directly connected to issues of place and belonging, fabricated through a constant relation with the ritual and *cerimónias di uso*, traditions from home.

Almost all families in Guinea have one or more relatives residing in Portugal, and the constant flow of people and goods back and forth is an important reality, visible in the movement of people at the Lisbon airport on days of flights to and from Bissau. The airport becomes a place where people gather to meet relatives or friends and to receive goods *di tera* (from home), or to send things back, and say goodbye to the ones who leave, taking other western and modern products with them (Saraiva 2007).

Guineans recreate their identity through re-elaboration of the references and codes from home and by relating them to the ones from the host country. They create new networks and forms of interaction, institutions, symbols and cultural practices which allow for a recreation of the past and a construction of the present, in a permanent negotiating process, within their own community and within the encompassing Portuguese society (Quintino 2004; Saraiva 2007, 2008).

Cutting across not only different social and economic groups, but also ethnic markers, Quintino (2004: 263) explains how the *tchon* (original grounds) is an important territorial and ethnic reference. Its symbolic construction is based on language and a common past, rooted in the social organisation of the *tabanka* (village), and the duties one has towards the lineage and members of the *moransa* (extended family living together in a compound). An 'ethnicity package' is thus constructed, comprising several elements that are manipulated in the highly symbolic process of relating to their origins. These elements (territory, language, skin colour, dressing codes, music, dance, religion, and healing practices) are manipulated in order to construct one's identity in relation to other Guineans and to the Portuguese. In the midst of all these, religious practices and funerary ceremonies are of utmost importance.

Even in the diaspora, the sacralization of a new dwelling follows the same guidelines as in the original grounds. It acknowledges the relation with the ancestors (forefathers who have died and live in the other world) through the placement of the *testos* (altars) dedicated to them and the protective *irãs* (spirits that one should worship and respect in order to have them as protective entities). It also acknowleges all the magical-religious ceremonies that go along with such emplacements, of which the *darma* (to pour beverages and food for the ancestors) is the most significant, because of its direct symbolism of the connection with the ancestors in the other world (Saraiva 2007).

Life and Death in Guinea-Bissau

Since there is a large ethnic diversity in Guinea-Bissau, not all funerals are alike**.** The followers of Islam respect Islamic ways and have the body buried as soon as possible, wrapped in a white shroud. Christians try to have funerals where an officiant (Catholic or Evangelical) is present and a mass is performed (especially in the capital, Bissau). Animistic groups, such as the Manjako, Pepel, Bijagós, Mancanha, and Balanta, normally wrap the body with several cloths. Amongst all these groups, it is the Manjako and especially the Pepel that are acknowledged for having the most elaborate use of cloths.

In the Pepel case, the first part of the funerary ceremonies include the wrapping of the body in cloths for several days (Fig. 1). The cloths are offered by the ones attending the funeral. They are offered to the bereaved and to the deceased and symbolically taken to the other world via the deceased, who serves as a courier between the two worlds. A prestigious elderly person must take plenty of cloths, which will be redistributed by the ancestors who live in the other world. The ritual takes place every day at the end of the day, when it is no longer very hot, and lasts until nightfall. The number of days depends on the prestige of the deceased; an elder and important person (religious officiant, chief, etc.) will be wrapped for many days (Fig. 2). When the wrapping is considered complete, the body is buried. Sometime after, the secondary funerary ceremonies (*toka chur*) take place, as people gather to celebrate the entrance of the spirit of the dead into the world of the ancestors. If the

Fig. 1 Pepel ritual of wrapping of the corpse in cloths before burial. (All photos by the author)

Fig. 2 Body of prestigious religious officiant after 6 days of wrapping in cloths

deceased had a good death, that is, if he/she died of old age, having accomplished all the rituals in life and thus potentially becoming a protective ancestor, it is a joyful occasion. Animals are sacrificed, and their blood is offered to the ancestors (Saraiva 2003, 2004a, b, 2008) (Figs. 3 and 4).

For both Manjako and Pepel alike, the celebration of the *toka chur* is essential for the spirit to reach its place in the other world and thus conclude the process of a "good death" so that it may become an ancestor (Saraiva 2008). Usually there is a large lapse of time between the first funerary rituals (which include the burial of the corpse) and the secondary ones, as the relatives need time to organize themselves and gather enough money to pay for the expenses. This time period also corresponds to the time the spirit needs to travel to the other world. For the *toka chur* to be effective and definitely conclude the mourning period as well as celebrate the placement of the spirit in the ancestral world, it must take place in the original grounds, in Guinea.

How does a deceased become a respected ancestor, if one dies and is buried abroad? The ideal situation is for the body to be sent home. But this very seldom happens. It is expensive and complicated to ship a body home. Although there are associations that help people send the bodies home, most of the time migrants are buried in Portugal (Saraiva 2016). Besides, many of them already have family also in the diaspora grounds, who want the body to stay near them; this includes both older people and second and third generation descendants. So, two parallel networks in charge of rituals are created, one in the diaspora and one at home. For all the different ethnic groups, two sets of rituals take place, one in the host country, another one at home. The days following a death are days of intense mobile phone

Fig. 3 *Toka chur* ceremony for an elderly person. People arriving with painted faces

Fig. 4 *Toka chur* ceremony for an elderly person. People arriving with animals to be sacrificed

use, with everyone being mobilized to come to the deceased's house and participate in the ceremonies. Performed in the host country, where the body is buried, and duplicated with gatherings, prayers and rituals back home, the primary funeral rituals are taken care of. But what happens with the secondary ones, the *toka chur*, which has to take place at home to be effective and allow one to become a respected ancestor?

Since the ideal situation is for one to become an ancestor, if the conditions for such a possibility are met, then the relatives must take upon themselves the duty to perform all the necessary rituals. Migrants are often the ones responsible to make this happen, and the pressure put upon them is strong. They often work longer hours to make enough money to pay for the *toka chur* expenses for their elderly deceased relatives back home. Often, their visits home are made for the specific purpose of organizing such rituals, thus also acquiring status and prestige amongst relatives and friends. In order for this to happen they have to try their best to be successful in their endeavors. Knowing that everyone, both abroad and back home, will be watching what and how they do things, whether they perform everything according to the tradition, if they spare no expenses for the sake of the wellness of the spirit of the deceased and of the whole lineage. Since a successful *toka chur* is the warranty for a protective (and not a vengeful) ancestor, relatives experience a lot of stress.

A Well-Known *djambakoss* Returns Home

Maria was a well-known Manjako female *djambakóss* (religious officiant) who migrated to Portugal, bringing with her the shrine she dedicated to her protective *irãs*, made out of the horns of the animals she sacrificed in her initiation rituals, cords, earth from the ancestral grounds, and other magical substances brought from Guinea-Bissau. During the time she lived in Portugal, she performed rituals for fellow Guineans, helping them to maintain their relations with the ancestral spirits, relieving them of their ailments and encouraging them to continue to worship their *irãs* from home. In the altar, one could also see the images of Our Lady of Fatima, acknowledging the influence of Portuguese Catholicism and the strength attributed to such divinities, mingling with the blood of the sacrificed animals to appease the *irãs*.

When she passed away, her daughter, a well educated woman in her thirties, mother of two boys, who was also living in Portugal, buried her in a Portuguese cemetery. The family and friends living in Portugal gathered to perform some rituals, but the most important ones were still to come and had to take place in the original home grounds.

Accordingly, almost a year after her mother passed away, the daughter organized things so that her *toka chur* could be performed back home, in Manjako land. But since her shrine was in Portugal, it was necessary to return it to its home origin, so that the *toka chur* could be entirely successful and her mother could become a protective ancestor. For weeks, the daughter organized an enormous trunk full of alcoholic drinks, gifts from the family living in Portugal, pieces of cloth and belongings from her deceased mother. Through a shipping agency, she managed to send it to Guinea-Bissau in a ship container. The shipment was done in time so that the container would be in the Bissau port in time for the ceremonies.

Some days before the daughter left for Guinea, her uncle, also a religious officiant, performed a ceremony, consecrating once again the elements in the altar, and allowing them to be removed and sent home (Figs. 5 and 6). A chicken was sacrificed, its blood was poured (*darmar*) over the altar, together with drinks also poured for the ancestors and the protective spirits. A few days later, the daughter carried with her in the plane those sacred items, wrapped in red shrouds. Once in the home grounds, they were placed in the deceased woman's home in the capital, so that another female relative, also a *djambakóss*, could carry on with the worship of this altar (Fig. 7).

Besides all the goods sent by ship for the *toka chur*, the daughter also carried the *mala*, a suitcase full of goods that belonged to the deceased. This suitcase was filled with the deceased's most important belongings, mainly clothing, jewelry and cloths, especially *panos penti*, the hand woven cloths highly valuable in Guinea and all over West Africa (Saraiva 2008). Even money was offered by relatives, which would be used towards covering the *toka chur* expenses (Fig. 8).

The drinks shipped were drunk over 3 days of intense rituals, where several animals –cows, pigs, chicken—were killed, cooked, and offered to over 300 guests. Several ceremonies took place, where the cloths shipped from Lisbon were offered, and various rituals were performed by other fellow *djambakóss* to insure that the

Fig. 5 In Portugal, *djambakóss* shrine with elements used in rituals and the images of our lady of Fatima

Fig. 6 In Portugal, ritual to remove the shrine

Fig. 7 The altar of the deceased *djambakóss* being returned to Guinea

Fig. 8 The *mala* and other ritual goods in Bissau, ready to be taken to Manjako land for the *toka chur* ritual

Fig. 9 The ritual of the "questioning of the corpse"

spirit of Maria was correctly taken care of and oriented towards the world of the ancestors. The next day, the *djongago* "questioning of the corpse", a ritual very common in West Africa, was performed and lasted all day, from morning to night time.

A skiff containing a piece of cloth from the deceased, metonymically symbolizing the body of the dead woman (buried in Portugal, as we have seen), was questioned by a religious ritualist in charge of this ceremony regarding the origins of her death, the way the *toka chur* and all the adjacent ceremonies had been conducted (whether they had been correctly done), to inquire if the ancestors and the spirits were pleased with the outcome. The skiff was carried by four men and taken all over the territory where she had lived her daily life. To each question the skiff moved back or forth, and the interpretation of the oracle was made by another *djmbakóss* (Fig. 9).

Only when all this was over was it considered that the rituals were completed for the time being, and that the spirit of Maria could then rest in peace in the ancestor world. Furthermore, only then her daughter felt she had accomplished her duties towards her mother and towards her lineage.

Spirits and People: Circulation and Belonging

Through this case study we can reflect upon two fundamental ideals that connect death and circulation—of individuals, goods and spirits. First there is the continuity of the family beyond national borders and surpassing its members' mobility. Such obligations are duties of the direct family, who are also the ones that may benefit from the protection of a dead person who becomes a protective ancestor. But they

can also suffer the revenge of an ancestor who did not have his or her rituals totally fulfilled. Second, it is exactly when one's physical mobility ends that the belongings symbolizing the person must return home and close the cycle of the connection to the home ground, the *tchon*.

The goods placed in the suitcase either belonged to the individual or were gifts offered at the funeral. No one comes to a funeral without a good to offer. It is believed that the deceased needs such things in his/her other world life. But all that the living offer to the dead will ultimately revert in their favor, as they are goods that enrich the other world, of which each will become part. Although they may seem contradictory, these two assumptions complement each other. What belonged to the deceased goes to the real family, both in the diaspora and in the place of origin, while all that is offered by the people coming to the ritual is symbolically given to the spirit of the deceased and to the world of the spirits in general.

This means that the generosity of the ones that pay their last homage to the dead reverts to their profit, since when they offer the recently dead a full *mala* they are also pleasing their own ancestors, who live in the other world and can thus receive the goods brought over by the spirit of the newly dead. He/she takes them to the other world and redistributes his surplus, as it was explained by one of the individuals I interviewed: "One must offer as much as possible; if the spirit arrives in the other world with a lot of clothes he redistributes them to the other…".

The organization of the suitcase takes place right after death, in the house of the deceased or of a family member. Songs are sung and drinks are poured (*darmar)* in the ground for the spirit, and, in the case of Muslims, it includes the sacrifice of an animal. *Darmar* has the ultimate meaning of communion between humans and ancestors. The idea is that ancestors surround us, and we need also to share with them what is going to be drunk or eaten. This is especially important in circumstances when the communication between the world of the living and the one of the dead is open due to the new death. It is a time when "the dead takes everything: drinks, food, and certainly, also the spirit of the dead". The ancestors live in a totally mobile world, and thus they are present in the ceremonies in Portugal as in Guinea. As one of my interviewees stated: "You see, they do not need to take a plane…if there is a ceremony here in Portugal, all the ancestors spirits come, and we need to nurture them".

The intense circulation between the two spaces and communities that emigration implies as well as the mobility of the spirits that must be present comes alive in the reciprocity of duties of "the ones that are here" and "the ones that are there". As we saw, if someone dies and is buried in Portugal, ceremonies must also take place in Guinea, and the family in Portugal must do the same if someone dies and is buried in Guinea.

Eating, drinking, offering cloths and the sacrifice of animals are offers for the dead which are part of the ceremonies in Portugal as in Guinea. As we saw earlier, all such instances are part the "ethnic package" (Quintino 2004) of Guineans in Portugal. By "ethnic package" I mean a group of instances which not only show the origin of the individual, but also proof of his/her connection to both the physical world of the home grounds as well as to the invisible world of the ancestors, which can be here or there. It is part of the moral and real expectations of any family back in Guinea-Bissau that emigrants contribute and help the family back home. Besides

the fact that being an emigrant means having succeeded in life, the funerals are events of high social value, in which one can exhibit the success achieved in one's migration trajectory, as Eric Gable (2006) explains: "It is also under the same logic that mainly highly successful immigrants have their bodies repatriated, since it implies high costs. The other case when bodies ideally should be sent back home is the case of the elderly, due to their structural position in the community, as individuals who hold important social, political or religious roles: a *omi garandi* (old man) has his house back home, has his place of burial already decided and must thus be sent back home…". In a certain way, there is a feeling that the elderly remain more attached to home than the younger generations who leave to try to build a successful life abroad. And it is normally only the elderly that may become ancestors.

This gerontocracy and hegemony of the elder, discussed by Ramon Sarró (2009) for the case of the Baga of Guinea-Conakry, also prevails over the triumph that migration may bring to the younger ones. As stresses, in a migratory logic of striving for success, a young person has not yet achieved it. It is also by contributing with their work abroad and their money for the funerary ceremonies of the elder that they slowly become recognized in their home communities, and acquire status and prestige, entering therefore also the long path to eventually one day become ancestors.

More important than the hegemony of the elder over the young is the way it continues beyond death. As Kopytoff (1971) explains, an elder is already considered a potential ancestor, and his/her death is a feast, a celebration of his/her entrance into the world of the dead and thus becoming a protective ancestor. An elder is someone with prestige which he/she carries to the other world. The death of an elder must thus be celebrated in style. Therefore, any death occurring in Portugal, of youngsters or elders, must also be celebrated back home in Guinea, although the responsibility to do so as soon as possible is felt more vividly in the case of the elders. It is also the elders that become ancestral protector spirits, and a *forquidja di alma*—a post that symbolizes the spirit of the dead one—is placed by the house when an elder dies and acts as a protection for the family and the community.

This is the logic for the offers that take place during the funerary rituals of the coastal animists in Guinea-Bissau, as the Pepel, Manjakos, Mancanhas, Bijagós and Balantas, and also by individuals who consider themselves Catholics but also practice traditional ceremonies. In these ethnic groups it is believed that there are two worlds, the one of the living and a parallel one inhabited by the dead. Good relations must be kept between the two worlds, in order for the ancestors to protect the living. The idea behind it is that the living must accomplish all the required rituals (death rituals but also everyday and cyclic ones), in order to keep a good relationship with the dead. The conception of the person and the family incorporates the idea that one is alive but can anytime be dead, and there is a constant flow between the two worlds.

The ancestors help in maintaining good relations between the two worlds, as long as the survivors accomplish and respect all the rituals and duties they have towards them and towards their predecessors, the elderly, even if one lives in Lisbon and the rest of the family in Guinea-Bissau.

References

Baumann, H., & Westermann, D. (1970). *Les peuples et les civilisations de l'Afrique*. Paris: Payot.

Bordonaro, L., & Pussetti, C. (2006). Da utopia da migração à nostalgia dos migrantes: percursos migratórios entre Bubaque (Guiné-Bissau) e Lisboa. In A. Lima & R. Sarró (Eds.), *Terrenos metropolitanos. Ensaios sobre produção etnográfica* (pp. 125–153). Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais.

Cavazzi, P. J. A. (1965). *Descrição histórica dos três reinos: Congo, Matamba e Angola* (Vol. I). Lisboa: Junta de Investigações do Ultramar.

Dias, J. (1992). "Os vivos e os mortos" *Africa. Nas vésperas do mundo moderno.* Catálogo da exposição realizada no Museu Nacional de Etnologia, Lisboa. Lisboa, Quetzal editora.

Einarsdottir, J. (2000). *We are tired of crying. Child death and mourning among the Pepel of Guinea-Bissau*. Stockholm: Stockholm University.

Evans-Pritchard, E. (1960). Introduction. In *Death and the right hand*. Glencoe: The Free Press.

Gable, E. (2006). The funeral and modernity in Manjaco. *Cultural Anthropology, 21*(3), 385–415.

Jao, M. (1995). A questão da etnicidade e a origem étnica dos Mancanhas. *Soronda. Revista de Estudos Guineenses, 20*, 19–31.

Jindra, M., & Noret, J. (2011). *Funerals in Africa. Explorations of a social phenomenon*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Kopytoff, I. (1971). Ancestors as elders in Africa. *Africa, 41*(2), 129–142.

Machado, F. (2002). *Contrastes e continuidades. Migração, etnicidade e integração dos Guineenses em Portugal*. Oeiras: Celta.

Peel, J. D. (2003). *Religious encounter and the making of the Yoruba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Quintino, C. (2004). *Migrações e etnicidade em terrenos Portugueses. Guineenses: Estratégias de invenção de uma comunidade*. Lisboa: Universidade Técnica de Lisboa-Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Politicas.

Rodrigues, A. V. (1968). Construções bantas de pedra em Angola. *Boletim de Investigação Científica de Angola, 5*(2), 169–189.

Saraiva, C. (2003). Rituais funerários entre os Papeis da Guiné-Bissau (Parte I). *Soronda, Revista de Estudos Guineenses, 6*, 179–210.

Saraiva, C. (2004a). Rituais funerários entre os Papeis da Guiné-Bissau (Parte II). *Soronda. Revista de Estudos Guineenses, 8*, 109–133.

Saraiva, C. (2004b). Embalming, sprinkling and wrapping bodies: Death ways in America, Portugal and Guinea-Bissau. Symposia. *Journal for studies in ethnology and anthropology*, 97–119. Craiova: Aius/Center for Studies in Folklife and Traditional Culture of Dolj County.

Saraiva, C. (2007). African and Brazilian altars in Lisbon: Some considerations on the reconfigurations of the Portuguese religious field. In N. Naro, R. Sansi-Roca, & D. Treece (Eds.), *Cultures of the Lusophone black Atlantic* (pp. 175–196). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Saraiva, C. (2008). Transnational migrants and transnational spirits: An African religion in Lisbon. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 32*(4), 253–269.

Saraiva, C. (2016). Circulating spirits and dead bodies. Funerary transnationalism among immigrants from Guinea Bissau in Portugal. *African Diaspora, 9*, 61–76.

Sarró, R. (2009). *The politics of religious change on the upper Guinea coast: Iconoclasm done and undone*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Thomas, L. V. (1994). Vieillesse et mort en Afrique. In *Vieillir en Afrique* (pp. 149–168). Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Van der Veer., & Peter, ed. (1996). *Conversion to Modernities*. The Globalization of Christianity. New York. Routledge.

Living Coffins and Death Among the Ga of Ghana

Roberta Bonetti

Abstract Until recently, little attention has been paid to the history of death practices in relation to their ritual objects and even less about the way such objects traverse the differentiated terrains of possession and control. Indeed, there was little analysis into the use of funerary objects such as coffins from a historical and ethnographic standpoint. The present chapter intends to explore the use and circulation of funeral sarcophagi *abebu adekai*, literally "receptacles of proverbs" and known worldwide as fantasy coffins. They are often constructed in various shapes and are generally painted in luminous enamel colors. These particular coffins are known for their rich and varied iconography; the decorations range from cocoa beans to images of cars, and all manner of imagery in between.

Abebu adekai are used primarily by the Ga people who live in Accra, south Ghana. They began to be used on a large scale in the early 1960s, soon after Ghana became independent. What emerged most significantly, however, is how these funeral sarcophagi have largely contributed to both the continuation and re-invention of practices and beliefs surroundings death amongst the Ga. I illustrate these artefacts as a strategy carried out by individuals to achieve some specific ends, so as to grasp the manner in which people currently transform funeral practices and their objects to meet new needs, express a new imaginary horizon, and create new meanings in a contemporary context.

Introduction

Death has been one of the major topics of interest for anthropologists studying African societies. The way death is managed within a society is often considered an important mode of understanding both its social fabric and its belief system. Funerary and mourning practices express and shape a wide range of social relations

R. Bonetti (✉)
School of Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Heritage, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy
e-mail: roberta.bonetti3@unibo.it

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_11

Fig. 1 Paa Joe's carpentry workshop. Nungua (Accra, Ghana) 2005. (Photo by the author)

within a society, including the maintenance of kinship ties, communal values, and notions of succession and property inheritance. However, until recently, little attention has been paid to the history of death practices in relation to their ritual objects and even less about the way such objects traverse the differentiated terrains of possession and control. Indeed, there was little analysis into the use of funerary objects such as coffins from a historical and ethnographic standpoint.

This chapter[1] intends to explore the use and circulation of funeral sarcophagi *abebu adekai* (Fig. 1), literally "receptacles of proverbs" and known as fantasy coffins. They are often constructed in various shapes and are generally painted in luminous enamel colors. These particular coffins are known for their rich and varied iconography; the decorations range from cocoa beans to images of cars, and all manner of imagery in between.

Manufactured mostly in Teshie and Nungua, Accra (Fig. 2), *abebu adekai* are used primarily by the Ga people who live in Accra, south Ghana. They began to be used on a large scale in the early 1960s, soon after Ghana became independent. These artefacts rapidly achieved popularity abroad where they were presented as artworks at international exhibitions and caught the interest of the mass media.

Several stages of fieldwork have allowed me to examine the re-creation of fantasy coffins and their creators within various social settings, both in Africa and in the West. Not a single object was observed as if it were locked in a glass showcase. I studied the multiple and related spaces that they repeatedly occupy with an eye to the effects produced on them by these interactions. What emerged most significantly

[1] This chapter provides only a basic framework for the understanding of some aspects of the funeral ceremonies of the Ga. Some parts of this essay use materials expounded in previous works already published (in particular, Bonetti 2006, published in Italian, laid the foundation for any further analysis: see also Bonetti 2009a, b, 2010, 2012, 2016).

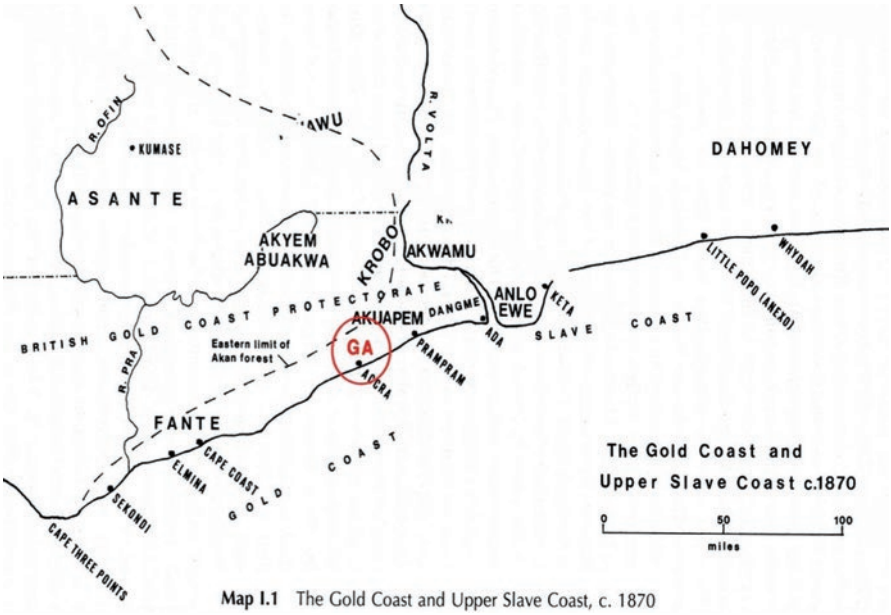


Fig. 2 The Gold Coast, 1870

is how these funeral sarcophagi have largely contributed to both the continuation and re-invention of practices and beliefs surroundings death amongst the Ga.

A Society Embedded in a Coffin

The 'symbolic structure' of the *abebu adekai*, can be understood only if set in relation to the continuous (and recent) social transformations of the Ga and the African continent, to the effects of the colonial and postcolonial events, and to the symbolic, cultural, magic-religious beliefs and economic dynamics of contemporary Africa. This means that the analysis of *abebu adekai* has had to question the politics of death. Funerary rites are spaces where reciprocity, bonds, reaffirmation of boundaries of affinity and hierarchies, and suspicions find their expression (Beneduce 2004, p. 90).

The persistence of Ga rituals is not questioned by the processes of modernisation, urbanization, and migration. These rituals allow us to understand how these societies are functioning, and also how the ceremonies and their objects play a part with other and new conflicts and how they represent new expressions and strategies of power within Ga society.

A good burial according to the customs and a good coffin both have important consequences for the dead and for the living as well as for those who are not yet born. Conversely, it is when ritual obligations are not respected, or not enough

attention is paid to their importance, that the impact is most felt, and therefore people go to great lengths to get the display of power and wealth right. Even if it is true that with death an individual's life apparently comes to an end, he or she still has the chance to exist and to act. His or her life continues 'in another place'. This place is guided by moral principles and demands attention, in that it is characterized by participation in a series of obligations and reciprocal exchanges between the living and the dead.

Faa-fo: Across the River

The distinction between a Christian funeral and a traditional funeral is a simplification that in reality does not correspond to the complexity of the various religious forms present in Ghana. Rather, the use of the term 'traditional' refers to the local way of defining funerary practices, even though such terminology was produced by external observers during the colonial period and has been utilized by the local churches.

Faa-fo–"across the river"–is, however, a pivotal point in the funerary ritual of the Ga. It represents the passage of the deceased from the world of the living to the world of the *gbohiiajeng,* the land of dead, and his reunion with his ancestors. Some refer to it as Yordon *faa-fo*, which means, "crossing the River Jordan," a variation that is most widespread among Christians. For them it is only this passage – to the other side of the river – that makes the reunion between the deceased souls and their ancestors possible. Abbey (Abbey 1967; Adjei 1943; Bonetti 2006) in his detailed description of Ga funerals, explains how death can occur: the spirit, *susuma*, during sleep can become detached from the body and wander from one place to another until dawn, then back again in the body. Death occurs when *susuma* definitively leaves the body: *esusuma eshi lē means* "his susuma has left", i.e. is dead. Both the *susuma* that the *kla* leave the body. In the Ga language, *susuma* indicates indistinctly soul, spirit and shade. Joyce Engmann (Engmann 1992, p. 154) speaks of a tripartite theory of the human person: *gbōmōtso* (body), *susuma* (spirit) and *kla* (the presence of God in man).

The ancestors and gods are central to the belief system of the Ga, and they are closely connected to the family structure and organization. But not all those who die, in fact, are welcomed as ancestors; only those who have reached an advanced age and a high prestige and that have accumulated wealth and generated many descendants are considered worthy. There is in this strict reciprocity. The living not only feel grateful toward the ancestors for their help and protection, but also feel obliged to keep good conduct to render honor to the ancestors that are an integral part of the family. Thus the funeral practices honor both the dead and the living, and are more or less elaborate depending on the importance of the deceased.

Among the Ga, every quarter (*akutso*) consists of a patrilineal organization called *weku* (the family group, determined by descent through the father) despite simultaneously having some matrilineal tendencies that have somehow infiltrated the Ga

Fig. 3 Abola Wecu during the wake-keeping (funeral service) of Nii Tackie Ofoli III, December, 2001. Bortianor (Accra, Ghana). (Photo by the author)

culture from the neighbouring Akan. The political and social importance of the *wecu* (ancestral home) is that this becomes the focal point into which all the descendants of the same founder converge in moments of crisis or during important ceremonies of life. All members of the patrilineal group who share the name of the family founder say in fact: "I come from" this house, even if they have never even visited it. "Abola wecu" (House of Abola), indicates the progenitor of this family unit (Fig. 3).

The *wecu*, today a symbolic house where the corpse is publicly displayed during the funeral ceremony, is pivotal to understanding the close bonds that unite the ancestors with the living, and to understand the importance of the intramural burials that have historically characterized the funeral rites of Ga (Bonetti 2006).

A Historical Overview of Funeral Practices and Intramural Burial

After the selection, in 1877, of Accra as the colonial capital, the town maintained its role as the political, sacred, and cultural center of the Ga, but British officials viewed the town as essentially a European domain. This collided with the practices of death and burial which had defined the ritual topography of the Ga world where, up until that point, a central role had been occupied by intramural burial. Indeed, the house encapsulated the memory of a group's origins and an identity rooted in the order of urban space (Parker 2000; Bonetti 2006, 2009a).

Those who were excluded from that privilege remained either unburied, or buried just below the surface, at the edge of town, which, in contrast to the order of the urban space, was populated with the vengeful, dangerous spirits of the corpses buried in that area. Among those expelled from the culture of the town were slaves, marginalized members of the community, those who had transgressed laws and been accused of witchcraft, and women who had died in childbirth (Daniell 1856, pp. 18–19). This ritual topography made it possible to offer a vivid portrayal of the differences created by the new urban economy, where the growing inequality in the world of the living was mirrored in the world of the dead. The very impact of credit, debit, and debt bondage, which banned one from being buried in Accra, visually illustrated the differences created by the growth of marketing in the new urban economy. In that case, if the debt was not extinguished, the deceased would not be buried with his family, nor would he be remembered by any of his descendants.

The intervention of the colonial state became effective only in 1888, when intramural burial was officially prohibited and burial in the cemetery was mandated (point 3., p. 2, Gold Colony Ordinance n. 7, 1888, ADM 4/1/8). The ruling was the result of an emerging colonial ideology in which the themes of legality, order, and control were linked to new studies on diseases and hygiene. The constant pressure from the government, which prohibited intramural burial and enforced the use of public cemeteries, was met with remarkable resistance until the beginning of the twentieth century, so that several members of the literate elite continued to be laid to rest in their houses rather than in public cemeteries (Bonetti 2006, 2009a).

Such resistance was characterized not so much by open conflict, but by evasion and innovation. Ironically, it was often these changes in the method of burial that led many to convert to Christianity and to represent a new point of strength for the Basel Mission, a Christian missionary society active in Ghana since 1815.

Rather than a clear break with previous religious practices, conversion was more often the result of a process of invention and negotiation. The fear of being buried away from home and handed over to an ordinary graveyard encouraged people to opt for burial in the more decorous cemetery of the Basel Mission, which was regarded as a sort of loophole since it was located inside the city limits. Reverend C.C. Reindorf (1895; see also Bonetti 2006, 2009a) observed that when those same people who abandoned the Christian church for fear of being buried outside their homes, (as is the Christian practice), felt death drawing near, they would re-convert for this very same reason – in order to be buried at the Basel mission.

Around 1890, same further innovations in mortuary practices began to emerge in response to the 1888 legislation. Rather than being buried inside the city just like the ordinary dead, some *mantsemei* (chiefs, kings) and other individuals of high social standing chose to be interred in special mausoleums in the outskirts of Accra. The gradual acquiescence to the new funerary regulations – in church cemeteries, public burial grounds, or mausoleums – was characterized by ongoing innovation in the funeral rituals conducted within the *wecu*, the house of the common ancestor. The "Cemeteries Ordinance" of 1891 (National Archives of Ghana: ADM 4/1/9) served as an appendix to the Ordinance of 1888 and had the goal of clarifying the difference between a public cemetery and a private cemetery, insisting on the ban of

intramural burial and imposing sanctions and punishments for exhumation, the removal of corpses without the Governor's consent (Bonetti 2009a, p. 106).

Burial in the areas between the city and the rest of the country represented a striking innovation, the social significance of which was often contested by marginalized members of the community. The reformulation of ritual space in the early colonial period did not simply pin British officials against upholders of Ga communal tradition, but also set some Ga people against Ga merchants who had absorbed the culture of the English elite. Some of them had converted to Christianity, while others were Euro-Africans who occupied important positions in Ga society.

It is within this context of expansion and new forms of marginalization, that one has to look for the source of the new creative energy that generated the iconography of 'fantasy coffins' (Quarcoopome 2003, p. 269; Bonetti 2006, 2010). The *abebu adekai* emerged as a peculiar system of representation and social differentiation that functioned and still functions today within a well-defined niche of Ga culture, one with a distinct and autonomous economy in the broader and more diversified setting of Accra. According to Nii. O. Quarcoopome, it was the combination of these factors as outlined above that led to the Ga's closed and defensive attitude, which in turn contributed to their marginalization in the metropolitan regions of Accra (Quarcoopome 2003). The images popularized by the fantasy coffins have been recreated due to the transformation occasioned by the new economic system, which has encouraged the rise of labor associations (in the manner of cooperatives) that specialize in one type of work.

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that from the very outset great emphasis was placed on representations of means of transport: automobiles, *tro-tro*, trucks, boats of every fashion. From 1960 to 1980, the profession of driver represented good social status, since it entailed not only ownership of a motorized vehicle, but also a flexible work schedule and a certain amount of financial stability. To possess a car became a sign of prestige for all strata of society, a status symbol that was not necessarily rooted in circumstances of birth or cultural level.

Receptacles to Hide Local Practices

There are no archaeological records of the use of wooden coffins by the Ga before 1873. However, Marmol, in his report on Accra in the early years of the nineteenth century, made a clear reference to the use of wooden coffins. In fact, in this period, some of the Ga used to place the body in a wooden coffin, i.e. in a gun-chest upgraded properly for the corpse that the Ga purchased from the Europeans. He wrote that the Europeans also used gun chests. There was, in fact, an expression among the English on the Coast when someone was very ill, "He only wants a gun chest" (Winsnes 2009, p. 42). Marmol added that sometimes these chests were used just as they were; on other occasions the Ga used ship's chests or even cloth chests. Inland, these chests were rarer, and the bodies were still being arranged on large

Fig. 4 Carrying the canoe coffin around the village. October, 2002. (Accra, Ghana). (Photo by the author)

mats made of plantain or other leaves. This was also standard practice on the coast even for the poorest (Winsnes 2009, pp. 42–43).

Generally, before the twentieth century, the Ga would wrap the body of the deceased in a mat prepared specifically for this purpose and then place it on a wooden board to be carried on the heads of pallbearers through the streets of the village. The English considered this practice fetishistic and forced the use of Western coffins. The Ga introduced the classic European coffins, but they still maintained the custom of carrying the bodies – or rather, now the coffins – above their heads through the streets of the village. This custom is well known to anthropologists working in West Africa, and it refers to the use of carrying the coffin (Fig. 4) (formerly, only the corpse) around the village before bringing it to the place of burial. Today, this practice is performed only in what local people call traditional funerals, and in such cases the coffin is carried in a winding way around the village. During this procession, ending at the burial site, the coffin is brought to the gates of the main houses so that people can bid farewell to the deceased, while an elder pours libations to wish the dead person a safe journey home.

The use of the coffin occurred, in fact, under pressure from the colonial administration. The "Cemeteries Ordinance" of 1891 (Bonetti 2009a, p. 107) also concerned the use and misuse of the coffin (point 23 p.6): "It shall be the duty of every person having the charge and control of any burial to see that the corpse to be buried is placed in the coffin, and is duly conveyed to the place of burial and is buried, and any such person as aforesaid who shall knowingly bury or attempt to bury any coffin

in which there is no corpse and any person who shall knowingly assist, or be concerned in, the burial of any such coffin shall be guilty of an offence, and on conviction thereof shall be liable to a penalty not exceeding 20 pounds or to imprisonment with or without hard labour for any term not exceeding 3 months" (ADM 4/1/9).

When the English forced the Ga to use coffins, the adoption of European-style coffins wasn't easy and immediate and gave rise to ambiguous situations. It seems, in fact, that for a long time the coffin was used as a strategic object to safeguard local practices. While an appearance of burial was carried out according to the dictates of Christianity and the law, the local practice of intramural burial was kept alive (Field 1961; Winsnes 2009). The colonial state never had complete control over the burial of the elderly. Not even the most zealous health official would dare check the coffin during the journey from the house to the cemetery, and Field herself declares that the destination of the deceased person's remains was never truly certain (Field 1961, p. 199; Bonetti 2006, 2009a).

In my field research, burial in secret places or in people's homes is currently still practiced only for individuals of high social standing and in certain cases the coffin is utilized as a strategic instrument in order to hide the ancient practice of home burial, even if, in fact, nobody can point exactly to the site [or reveal the site] where the deceased will actually be buried. This fact is also confirmed by Kodzo Paaku Kludze with regards to Ewe Chiefs. He declares that most chiefs are actually buried in secure rooms at home.

The reasons for secrecy during the burial of chiefs are rooted in history. In the old days, a dead chief would not be buried alone, just as in his lifetime he could not walk alone (Koodzo Paaku Kludze 2000, p. 339). In pre-colonial times human sacrifice was an important part of a big funeral ritual, and several persons were killed in order to be buried with the bodies of dead chiefs and powerful men, a practice related to the common assumption that life after death would be essentially similar to life on earth (Parker 2000, Bonetti 2009a). This fact explains why the chief's death was concealed. Because of the human sacrifice, secrecy was essential. Another reason for the secrecy was to prevent ordinary citizens from interfering with the corpse of the chief. It was a great disgrace if the skull of a dead chief came into the possession of an antagonist, or a rival community or chiefdom. To have "the physical possession of the skull of a rival chief, […] is traditionally perceived as tantamount to an exultation almost comparable to a military victory" (Ffoulkes 1909, p. 159, Bonetti 2009a).

'Expense Is a Symbol': Solidarity, Prestige and Competition

From the second half of the twentieth century, in cities, increasingly hospitals have taken care of the dying, and local undertakers of the funeral services. In other words, professionals have taken on the responsibility of the tasks which originally belonged to the family and to the community. The funeral industry has become big business, especially when allied with the insurance industry. However, the movement of

money and the costs for the funeral still take place within a social model that involves reciprocal responsibilities within a family group, and which specifies who should contribute and in what way, so despite the outsourcing, the family still holds the key responsibilities for organizing the whole ensemble.

According to Van Der Geest (2000) we can understand the significance of Ghanaian funerals by paying more attention to the living than to the dead, and by asking questions more in terms of the socio-political implications than religious ones, and more precisely in terms of the politics of reputation. To gain the status of ancestor, for example, a person needs to have acquired power and authority, which are both acquired thanks to success in life (De Witte 2001). Amongst the Ga, in fact, the ceremony for the deceased involves the movement of large sums of money, goods and services. And it is through this that individuals recreate and strengthen their social relations and cultural values.

The most important key family obligation is the supply of money to cover all the many costs: the coffin, symbolic vestments for the deceased and the funeral itself. The costs are highly variable, depending on the size and type of the ceremony in question, and the family counts on receiving donations from participants. Thus individual and collective interests converge in the creation of a family image, and in the growth of its prestige. This image is not, however, without areas of considerable ambivalence, that bring together, not always comfortably, elements of competition, family prestige, and the honor of the deceased. The importance of a prestigious funeral was affirmed by various sources. Nii Atsen of Teshi, in answer to my question as to why people spend so much on a funeral, told me:

> The reasons are related to aspects of competition. […] It is not a good thing. Let's suppose that a person in a family dies, the *expenditure is a symbol.* They exercise financial power. If your mother dies and you pay for her funeral, then tomorrow mine dies and I will spend much more than you spent today on your mother. Thus one creates enormous debts even before anything happens. Thus leaving the body in the morgue for so much time is nothing but a question of competition (Nii A. Teshie, January 8th 2002).

There are various ways of expressing competition between family members in the context of the funeral. Returning to the village from the city for the funeral becomes a chance of exhibiting success; and this is even truer for those who return from a faraway country. This success is expressed not only through clothing, but also through the means used to reach the place of the funeral, and through donations that are registered and publicly declared over the loudspeaker. These donations demonstrate solidarity with the group and the generosity on the part of the donor, but they also help underline his or her social status.

The importance of the family unit is evident from the wording of obituaries placed in newspapers and posted in public spaces. They emphasize the relationships the living hold with the deceased, and the social standing of the individuals who are going to participate in the funeral. These are details which serve to highlight the social status of the deceased.

Over the course of the last few years, funerals have undergone rapid changes especially in relation to new technologies, some of which also help establish and reinforce social differences. The first of these concerns the preservation of the

corpse. In the past, the corpse was normally buried on the third day following death, with the exception of individuals of higher status who were preserved for a longer time. Today, corpses are now refrigerated and embalmed extending the period of preparation for funerals. Funerals are also photographed and captured on video cameras.

Today the corpse of an adult stays for 2 weeks–6 months in the morgue before being buried – and in the case of elderly and/or particularly well-to-do and distinguished individuals, it can be kept in the morgue for years, maintaining in this way a continuity with ancient practices. The conservation of the body as well as the type and the quality of the celebrations, are determined both by the status of the deceased and the available resources of the living. The possibility of keeping the body for longer periods of time at the morgue appears strategic. The preservation period increases the prestige of the family, as everyone is aware of the high cost of preserving corpses. This cost grows exponentially the longer the deceased is kept there. For this reason, as the director of the Accra morgue told me in 2001, "Many families end up moving their deceased every week from one morgue to another in order to keep down the costs. Another reason for the long preservation of the corpse has to do with conflicts between heirs and contenders that surround the enstoolment [enthronement] of the new chief". The indefinite preservation of the corpse, while useful for the organization and preparation of the funeral in all its parts – to summon the relatives, and to tidy up the *wecu* –, has also created new opportunities for the different interest groups which revolve around the family of the deceased, particularly for those who have the task of dealing with the body, or those who have to organize the outside services for the various phases of the funeral.

I have so far discussed the context of funerals in which the coffins bear significance; I will now deal with the coffin as a veritable object for wear, not just as a status and prestige symbol of the deceased and of the household but also as a dangerous, powerful object/image. As a palanquine and coffin maker told me at Labadi in 2015, "we can give multiple shapes to these objects, what matter most is the insignia, the emblem".

The Power of the Images: *Abebu adekai* for Wear

I highlighted the importance of 'wearing' *abebu adekai* in various aspects of social life (Bonetti 2012) and the fact that the 'wearing' of particular coffins represents a proper status symbol: the deceased, throughout the funeral, 'wears' the *adeka* as if it were an item of clothing, just as in life he or she would have worn accessories, textiles, and symbols appropriate to his or her social status.

As with the garments, the coffin can produce an "aesthetic of bodily presence," that is, the look, feel, color, and texture of cloth-covered coffins might recall the corporeal presence of the deceased. Objects such as Nike sneakers, cellphones, and luxury cars become, in fact, not only aesthetic objects but also agents of transformation that are "consumed," "inhabited," and "worn."

Although most of the literature on *abebu adekai* tends to present them as direct symbols of the aspirations of the deceased, my fieldwork showed that the motives for their production appear to be much more complex (Bonetti 2006, 2009a, b, 2012). In this section, I will concentrate on their political and transformative functions, and on the power of their imagery, whilst presenting only certain representative cases. I omit the funerals of priests and spiritual leaders, and also funerals among the most ordinary, since the design of the coffins of these latters are chosen most of all because of their originality, personal flights of fancy of the family or the deceased, or simply to surprise the participants. Even in the latter cases, the funeral takes place within an image of success and prestige of the family. In fact it wasn't uncommon at all for me to hear long debates in the coffin makers' workshops, sometimes very animated, between the daughters and/or sons of the deceased on the form of the coffin to be made.

As Comfort, a Ga woman who had lived in Las Vegas for more than 20 years, told me one day:

> There are nine of us brothers and sisters, and we all have to be happy with the coffin. My sister, who lives in Nungua, has decided to have the coffin made in the shape of a royal carriage, like Queen Elizabeth's (Fig. 5), but I don't understand why. It's only to surprise people, only to get a laugh. If she's decided that, ok, but I would have preferred a normal coffin [she indicated a wooden coffin with some gold decoration]. It's more elegant, more respectful, and more sophisticated (Comfort, Teshie, August 26, 2015).

Even the coffin images chosen for their ability to surprise, entertain, and thereby create an unforgettable funeral, are not vehicles of escape to a fantasy world, but represent something associated with daily existence. All of these representations have created new forms of social interaction that "defy existing relations, space,

Fig. 5 Royal carriage coffin during manufacturing by Eric Adjetey Anang, August 2015. Teshie (Accra, Ghana). (Photo by the author)

genre, and the social hierarchy" (Larkin 2002, pp. 319–320). We must consider the political and social spheres in which they assume meaning (Bonetti 2009a, p. 104) and the historical and cultural complexity of a long iconographic tradition. The coffin can affect the social world as a medium through which to honor the deceased but also as a tool to gain prestige in the competition between living beings both to secure scarce resources and to exclude all others from using them.

According to Quarcoopome (2003, p. 266), the invention of *abebu adekai* created the perfect synthesis between the legitimized use of European coffins and the local practice of carrying the corpse over one's head or shoulder. The shape of the coffin facilitated rapid movements and the shifting of the coffin in the air. These operations were rather difficult to perform with Western-style coffins. However, this information is not enough to explain the wide diffusion of these coffins with their peculiar iconography. One might easily counter Quarcoopome's point by arguing that classic European-style coffins could in turn have been equipped with special handles for easier transportation.

What emerges from a series of field investigations is the particular communicative potential of the iconography featured in *abebu adekai*. The use of images is crucial to understanding the success and function of these coffins in the local context. It is the story being woven around them, their mythical, historical, functional frameworks that initiate a dialogue with the image, and such dialogue is never banal or fixed. During the funeral performance, the repetition of images familiar to everyone (stools, pirogues, bibles) does not necessarily imply a reduction of their effectiveness. A ritual performance, which is repeated and known to everyone, leads people to recognize allusions to current political circumstances, for within a ritual familiar symbols may be manipulated in unpredictable ways (Bonetti 2006, 2009a).

I had the opportunity to witness a funeral that featured an elephant coffin for Chief Nii Amartey Kwei II. As many coffin makers agreed, it is quite rare to find this symbol actually reproduced on a coffin. He died on January 18, 2006 and his funeral was held at Kweiman on November, 22/25, 2007. In this case, the choice of an elephant as a model for a coffin built by Paa Joe was justified by the fact that the deceased was a very old chief, who governed in an area quite far away from Accra (Figs. 6 and 7). The churches present at the funeral, as well as the biographies of and tributes to the deceased, presented an image of him as one who had lived an exemplary Christian life. Another determining factor in the choice of the coffin was the fact that, in an environment of fierce competition among groups in which the figure of the chief can become a questionable claim, the use of the elephant was necessary to make the genuine power of the chief visible. Only the elephant, together with a grandiose, prestigious funeral, could become the publicly acknowledged testament to the real status of the chief. As the Kweiman *otsaame* (a linguist and a spokesman for the chief) declared:

> The elephant is rarer than the stool, only a real chief can choose it. If you are not a chief, the family can choose a stool because everybody can use the stool in the house. But in this case there was an elephant because the deceased was a real chief. The elephant is the representation of the most powerful animal in the forest, a symbolic representation of the king of the animal world.

Fig. 6 Elephant coffin for the deceased Nii Amartey Kwei II, manufactured by Paa Joe, November 2007. Kweiman (Accra, Ghana). (Photo by the author)

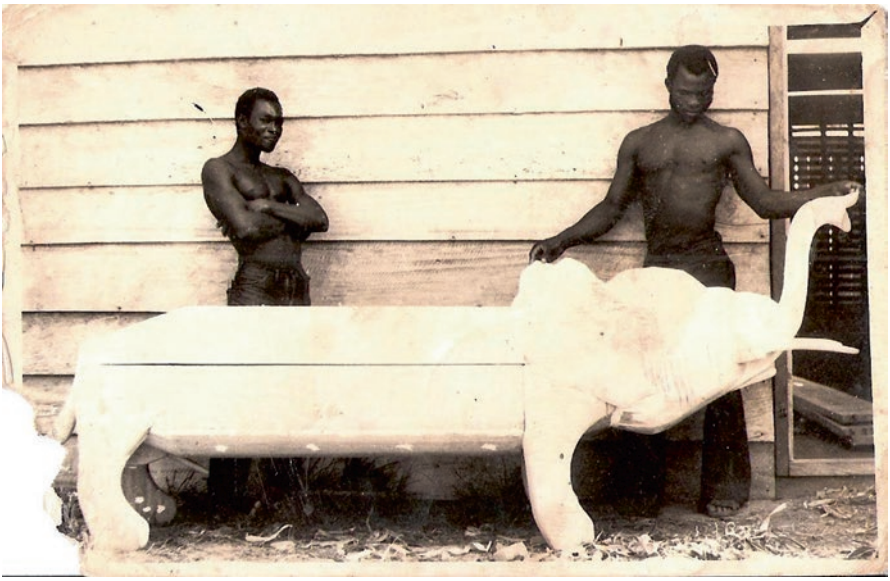


Fig. 7 Elephant coffin. Seth Kane Kwei workshop in Teshie (Accra, Ghana). 1982–1983. (Courtesy Eric Adjetey Anang)

The emblem of the family is represented by an elephant leaning against a palm tree. The proverbs connected to it are: "Keji onyie shu see le wuu bo," which means, "When you walk behind an elephant, you do not collect dew." "Tso ni wa', le ake tsina n'moo" ("It is only to a strong tree that you can tie a cow"). This means that an elephant is the strongest animal that can protect you. It can lean on the palm tree because it is a solid, stable plant.

The field investigations reveal how the characteristics of each coffin are inseparable from other images against which they stand in contrast. The symbolism of coffins reveals how the figure of the chief, expressed by the marketing of symbols such as elephants, stools, and lions, is actually negotiable; we see not only elephant coffins in contrast to stool coffins, but also stool coffins in contrast to each other.

The public appearances of *adekai* may be conditioned by the tense local political situation, and they may also become instruments for transgressing and attacking normative limits. Some spectacularly extravagant coffins, which initially caused great scandal, can also be seen as perfect reflections of a political context in which they were produced. The transfer of property from their possessors to the heirs usually takes place after the possessor's death, and this is one of the main causes for the heated conflicts that flare up among family members behind the scene at funerals.

Kathryn Firmin-Sellers has explored the transformation of the system of property rights on the Gold Coast between 1927, when indirect rule was at its height, and 1957, when the Gold Coast won independence. This was the moment that launched the large-scale diffusion of *abebu adekai* (Bonetti 2012, p. 267). The transfer of administrative capital from the British colony to Accra increased the value of the land and as land has become increasingly scarce its contested nature has become more acute, resulting in increasing difficulties to realizing land sales (Amanor 2010, p. 104). Chiefs and non-chiefs alike reinvented tradition by defending different and sometimes contradictory customs that granted them privileged access to and control over land, and reformed traditional state institutions with the aim of enforcing those rights. This resulted in an ever more fluid and insecure land tenure (Firmin-Sellers 1996, p. 37).

This was a moment when a division emerged between the elite with closer ties to the state – acculturated, Christianized, and residing in the residential neighbourhoods of Accra – and the remaining disadvantaged population, which participated in the informal economy and occupied the peripheral zones of the city. The social landscape corresponded to the iconography disseminated primarily through the *abebu adekai*. Research into the account books of some coffin makers reveals that the typologies of the most frequently requested coffins are based even today on images related to informal and casual occupations, such as means of transportation or products made by women sold in retail stores (Fig. 8). If the images promoted by the coffins refer to the social sphere, then one must consider that from its very beginning the coffin provided the narration of various local stories that simultaneously reflected and questioned the hegemonic order.

Today, another important problem of the land tenure system is the endemic conflict involving chiefs, family heads, government, and individual groups in various permutations. Such conflicts may be inter-ethnic or intra-ethnic, between groups,

Fig. 8 Red Pepper coffin manufactured by Paa Joe ca. 1992. National Museum of African Art, Washington. (Photo by the author)

between chiefs and their people, between government and communities, between communities and transnational corporations, or between individuals who have a claim or derivative rights to land, including foreigners, tenants, migrant farmers, women, and youths (Aryeetey et al. 2007; Ayee et al. 2008, p. 3).

In this scenario, the *abebu adeka* becomes an instrument to improve one's social status and represents a creative action on the part of the individuals. The coffin becomes an instrument that can "symbolize, invoke, and even help generate power and authority" (Cole 1989, p. 15; Bonetti 2009a). The symbolism of coffins reveals how the figure of the chief, expressed by the marketing of symbols such as elephants, stools, and lions, is actually negotiable. Many interviewed declare that *abebu adeka* embodied power and authority, so that the deceased has the right to be recognized with his social position, and the members of the community have the moral duty to confirm this position. For this reason, the coffin can originate conflicts among social groups when inappropriate type of coffins are chosen for some individuals, not in line with their social status. Without this backdrop the communicative force of the visual language of coffin would remain empty and incomprehensible.

From the confrontation between symbols conveyed by *akpakai* (Figs. 9 and 10) – palanquins, from which the *abebu adekai* partly derive – and those that have become ever more widely disseminated since the 1950s by *abebu adekai*, emerges a social picture in which attention seems to concentrate increasingly on representations of the personal interests of the various families. While the *akpakai* represents a nearly constant and durable effigy of power, with which not only the actual member but

Fig. 9 Red cock apkakai (palanquine). Red cock is the symbol of the neighborhood of La in Accra. The red cock is also known as the 'Who gbee la gbee," meaning the people of La wake up to the crowing of the rooster. The rooster is the symbol of the strength and triumph of the La people. October 2008. Courtesy of Nii Akornor We of Kowe Quarters. (Photo by Nii Yemo Nunu/ Kotopon African Images)

also the entire collective identifies, the *abebu adekai* distances itself from this type of representation and is a symptom of the social crisis that expresses itself through the demand for individualized representation and the family's personal affirmation, provoking antagonism and ostentatious forms of exhibitionism in various houses (Bonetti 2012, p. 272). Not all the individuals depicted through *abebu adekai* can boast historical pedigrees that are universally acknowledged, and in such a case the effigy imprinted on a coffin becomes comprehensible only within the restricted circles of the rival families.

If in certain situations a royal symbol can be selected independently of questions related to aspects of power, analysis of such selection ultimately confirms the power that such images embody:

> Recently, after the death of a boy […] the family agreed to make an eagle (Fig. 11) even though the boy was not a chief, but because he was very famous, and since there are no chiefs in Teshie they thought they could make what they wanted. But later, it happened that during the funeral there was a strong sense of discontent. This demonstrated that it is not always possible to play with the symbols. Even if there are no chiefs, the image of the coffin unleashed a fight among the participants at the funeral (M., Teshie, November 2008).

The use of the coffin is more than a game of vanity; it is the continuity of the family, defended through the image that is at stake in funerals. The artefacts

Fig. 10 Akpakai (palanquine) in Ngleshie Alata Mantse palace. James Town Accra Ghana. August. 2015. (Photo by the author)

Fig. 11 Eagle Coffin. Manufactured by Eric Adjetey Anang. (Accra, Ghana). (Photo by the author)

Fig. 12 Stool Coffin. Nungua (Accra, Ghana). 2002. (Photo by the author)

represent areas of structural ambiguity and stand as symbols of necessary, but covertly dangerous, power.

As Michelle Gilbert states (1994, p. 100; Bonetti 2006, 2009a), "ritual symbols are not just aesthetic: they are condensed expressions of authority and also contain an in-built ambiguity." The *abebu adeka* is much more than a decorative form; the shape, the bright colors and facets of the *adekai* are fundamental in creating the magnetic power of the artefact. The uniqueness of each *abebu adeka* stems more from the way in which it is different from the others than from the peculiar message it contains. To go back to the example mentioned above, the elephant coffin acquires its full meaning if related to the stool coffins (Fig. 12), as the chief's spokesman said. In this process coffins-images become essential tools for manipulating life, its codes and rules. Through this object, people can differentiate themselves from their neighbours, rivals, and even predecessors.

A Coffin that Reveals by Concealing

The coffin can increase the prestige and success of the deceased and his family. Specific code determines the choice of a coffin with one image over another. Each choice is the result of a process of negotiation among the family members, and it is loaded with diverse meanings that transform the social agents themselves. A conflict of this kind took place during the planning of the funeral of Nii Tackie Ofoli III, a village chief of the Abola Nukpa House of Bortianor in the outskirts of Accra. Nii Tackje Ofoli was survived by five wives and seventeen children. He died on October 7, 2001, at age 53, at the Accra hospital. His funeral was held on December 7–9,

Fig. 13 Bible coffin manufactured by Daniel Mensah Oblie, December 2001, Teshie (Accra, Ghana). (Photo by the author)

2001, in his village. In this case the reasons for discord were more symbolic than economic, in relation to the choice of coffin. On one side the elders asked the deceased's children – who have the responsibility to buy the coffin – for a symbol suitable to the high status of the deceased, such as an elephant. On the other side, the widows of the deceased demanded a Christian symbol. Even though the elders insisted that Isaac Tackie was not a Christian – his polygamous lifestyle was proof of it – in the end they decided for a coffin in the shape of a bible. Thus, the bible coffin, a symbol of the importance that the Apostolic Church of Ghana, attended by the widows, held in that community, ensured that the respectability and prestige of the family would be recognized.

The bible coffin with an internal lining of white plissé fabric featuring an image of Christ (Fig. 13), was manufactured by Daniel Mensah (known as Hallo). From choosing the wood to the final decoration, he spent approximately 3 weeks building it. The day after the funeral, S.T. Tackie, the brother of the deceased, made a point of claiming:

> My brother was a chief, and as a chief he deserved to be buried in an elephant-shaped coffin. [...]. But yesterday the coffin was shaped like a bible because my brother was a Christian. [...]. For this reason a Christian must be buried in a bible-shaped coffin [...]. Bible-shaped coffins are prepared for devout Christians (S.T.T. 9 December 2001).

These contradictory statements on the identity of the deceased reveal structural ambiguities and paradoxes regarding his position, which not even his funeral can resolve.

One of the consequences of the crossover between Christian and native traditions is that during the 1980s and 1990s a change in the institution of chieftaincy occurred. New chieftaincy positions were created and given to wealthy literate and well-educated Christians. Today, being a Christian and a chief is both prestigious and not mutually exclusive making their relation more complex. Michelle Gilbert proposed looking at these categories not as contradictory in historical and moral terms, but as complementary and inseparable, as overlapping, changing, and sometimes competing (Gilbert 1995, p. 35; Bonetti 2006, 2009a).

Social actions and conflict surrounding one person's death showcase community politics centered on a coffin. Even though Tackie Ofoli already had a widely recognized social identity, the need remained for his religious identity to be properly legitimized in relation to his home identity. This legitimization could only be procured by others, and the coffin played a particular function after his death. Christianity here was not just a question of one individual's belief: the community had to accept him, and it was a political issue as well, because he was rich and a chief.

What emerges from my interviews about methods of preparing both Christian and traditional funerals is the combination of diverse religious aspects which are presented as a coherent view of the world.

In choosing to transmit exclusively those elements that it intends to emphasize, the coffin operates a careful selection among the wide spectrum of mnemonic material at its disposal, condemning other memories to oblivion. Memory and oblivion are connected by a relationship that is more complex than it may initially appear. In the family parable expressed by the coffin, only a fluid, unstable, disputed, incomplete history is left. The bible conceals (or announces?) the distance of the deceased from a traditional religion, but at the same time it saves the familiar context. What emerges very clearly is a connection among terms that are usually distinct: revealing or concealing, truth or falsehood. Truth is an affirmation that can be perpetually recreated, but there is neither counterfeit nor orthodoxy. It is not a final situation, just like a fact is not final. And since the performative action of the *abebu adeka* is presented in a social relation, it cannot be treated by the researcher as a mere thing, because the meaning of the dialogue set in motion by the coffin becomes clear only through a structure of social relations to which it is connected.

It is now useful to consider whether the choice of such a fleeting item and the image of *abebu adeka* (as opposed to a more durable concrete effigy) might be more functional to the ephemeral powers that it serves. The continuous negotiation and reinvention of the present in a struggle over the control of communal spiritual and material property needs the enactment of an endless process of oblivion in order for cultural memory to be perpetually reconstructed.

The *abebu adeka* can be regarded as a mask, which "is not primarily what it represents but what it transforms, that it to say, what it chooses not to represent" (Lévi-Strauss 1982, p. 144). Hence, the particular history embedded in the coffin determines its existence; the coffin may convey a message that has the power to transform precisely that which it disguises.

The *Presence-Absence* of Living Coffins

In its relation to secrecy, the *adeka* evokes the creative and unknowable power of the sacred. In order to be usefully employed on a social level, sacred power needs to be set into an image or, to borrow Jean-Claude Schmitt's terminology, it must undergo processes of "figuration" (Schmitt 2002, p. 284). This can occur through the imagination, but also through the materiality of a concrete object. It is this kind of representational form which permits visibility and, therefore, a perception of the supernatural. The hundreds of images of the deceased on display during the funeral ceremonies (on T-shirts, gadgets, portraits, photos) create a clear contrast with the iconography of the coffin, on which no direct clear, individual portrait of the deceased exists. This absence of a true likeness has come to determine another kind of representation of death. Being decorated with imagery *relevant* to the deceased, but independent of his or her physiognomy, the *adeka* acquires superhuman qualities, while providing a form for the body of the deceased over the course of the funeral rituals. It is thanks to this indistinct representation of the deceased, somehow only an indirect reference to him or her that a new presence is ritually created. The absence of a portrait creates that 'presence-absence' whose existence one cannot be completely sure of, but at the same time, cannot doubt either (Bonetti 2009b).

During the funeral ceremony, as the coffin is about to enter the room of the deceased, excitement mounts, reaching its peak when the body is actually brought in (Fig. 14). Wrapped in a shroud for burial, the body is placed in the coffin with its

Fig. 14 Final farewell to Mary Ayele Quaye, aged 96, before closing the *adeka*. Amadun (Accra, Ghana), September 20, 2002. (Photo by the author)

face upwards, so that when it is moved after this, the head has to follow the feet ("head will follow foot"). From this point on, and for all present, the *adeka* will not be just a piece of carved wood, but the ritual image of the deceased, guiding the living to the burial place (Bonetti 2006, 2009b). This moment of the passage is the climax of the whole process and of the aesthetic problem that it resolves. It also causes an empathetic effect in the participants, in which the *abebu adeka* becomes more than just a simple wooden sculpture. It becomes a living body in motion. In this sense, the coffin of sculpted wood is precisely what a coffin (normally) is not. Like a person, to be able to become and to act like a living body, it needs to have a certain appearance, and to be consecrated in a certain way (Bonetti 2009b).

In this sense it is believed that the 'object-image' rather than the deceased is at work – as if a body with superhuman qualities were present. A Christian affirmed this as follows:

> Why Christians transport [the coffin] not at shoulder level, but lower down, is tied to religious reasons. They do this because Christian death was defeated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ triumphed over death. So the dead cannot reach that level. When the coffin is carried by hand it doesn't move and nothing dangerous can happen, but as soon as it is carried here [on the shoulders], the spirit rises up and your hands no longer can be controlled. So [the spirit] begins to take control, to direct the body of the deceased and also the people who carry it. Thus you will end up seeing the coffin go, turn, leap; you can see the coffin spin around itself, twist continuously on every side, if the spirit sees someone who... The coffin can go and identify the person who caused the death. Sometimes it happens that while the coffin moves along the street, it strikes its bearer, indicating that he is the guilty one. Sometimes it does not do so, but if it actually does so, to the suspected person [who caused the death], the bearers stop where the coffin indicates, and this is dangerous. (Theo, Accra, December 2002).

Thus we come back to the theme of the 'efficacy of images' (Bonetti 2009b). It is interesting that Christians who claim to be nonbelievers do not want to use the *adeka* for religious reasons, yet acknowledge its inevitable power. If the sculpture has life and can be dangerous, it is logical to think that it can be controlled. The persons interviewed were not satisfied with a simple description of a coffin's movement, but attributed feeling and emotions to it as well. Here the coffin assumes a form that allows the body to communicate through gestures that have to be simultaneously visible and legible to participants. Through movement – an action of its own body – the *adeka* becomes an instrument or tool, an extension of the person's body that speaks through gesture. To give "a blow to the bearer" means to create contiguity with the hand of the one who guides. In this case, the image of the coffin as an expression also of the social body appears clear.

As a confirmation of the power of these coffin-images, I have managed to collect various testimonies on the practice of hiring, or better still, the practice of returning a coffin to the coffin maker. What can happen is that one coffin is shown in public, and a different one is used for burial. When the coffin used during the funeral performance is returned to the coffin maker, the latter can give back between 40% and 70% of the total amount that he was paid for making it. There are many reasons for giving back a coffin, and, for many families, not always connected to difficult economic situations, as in the following example:

Fig. 15 Tiger coffin manufactured by Eric Adjetey Anang. March 2015. Teshie (Accra, Ghana). (Photo by the author)

> Using two coffins is useful to be able to carry out a burial secretly, and it's important to hide the burial of the *mantse* [chief]. But even at the moment in which the coffin is presented to the family, just a few days before the funeral, there can occur a conflict about accepting it, with some family members not being in agreement with the imagery or symbol chosen by the deceased's children, and hence the coffin is rejected. For example, that tiger you can see there (Fig. 15), that was made for a *woyoo* [priestess, female medium of a deity], but the old people, in the end, didn't think that such a powerful symbol was appropriate for a woman. That kind of coffin could only be made for a man (Kofi, August 30, 2015).

On the same topic of the efficacy and dangers of an image representing a tiger, an elder told me:

> We can't just bury any one in a leopard, or lion or a tiger, that's only for the royal family or an *asafoiatse* [leader of a military group] because these animals go into the jungle, go to war, they can attack you, and they can defend the village. You can even go to court for this [for having chosen an inappropriate image] (F.K. A. Donkor, August 23, 2015).

Even in this case, the interviewee clearly cross references the *adeka* with the symbolic animal (*insignia*). The *adeka* is not a substitute of the symbol, nor a replacement of the body of the deceased. The network of social action stemming from the *abebu adeka* has an equivalent on the participants' side. They see the wooden sculpture as a living being, and as such the *adeka* appears to have the abilities to act and think intentionally, as well as being able to see and move.

As we have tried to see in this essay, the *abebu adeka* speaks in many voices: the deceased, the competing members of the families and of the community, the coffin maker, the state. It embodies the many facets of the whole social spectrum and it may serve as a privileged, exceptional lens through which the complexity and rich social interactions of the Ga society can be gleaned.

References

Abbey, E. T. A. (1967). *Kẹdsi Afo Yordan. When the Jordan is crossed* (M. E. Kropp Dakubu, Trans., 1971) (pamphlet box, pp. 1–24). Accra: Bureau of Ghana Language.

Adjei, A. (1943). Mortuary usages of the Ga peoples of the Gold Coast. *American Anthropologist, 45*(1), 84–98.

Amanor, K. S. (2010). Family values, land sales and agricultural commodification in South-Eastern Ghana. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, 80*(1), 104–125.

Aryeetey, E., Ayee, J. R. A., Ninsin, K. A., & Tsikata, D. (2007). *The politics of land tenure reform in Ghana: From the crown lands bills to the land administration project* (Technical Paper, No. 71). Accra: ISSER.

Ayee, J. R. A., Frempong, A. K. D., Asante, R., & Boafo-Arthur, K. (2008). *The causes, dynamics and policy implications of land-related conflicts in the Greater Accra and Eastern Regions of Ghana* (Ghana report). African Studies Centre University of Leiden.

Beneduce, R. (2004). Politiche ed etnografie della morte in Africa subsahariana. *La Ricerca Folklorica, 49*(Apr), 89–102.

Bonetti, R. (2006). *Oggetti funerari dell'Africa contemporanea. Modalità di produzione, uso e rappresentazione nei musei etnografici*. Bologna: Baiesi.

Bonetti, R. (2009a). Absconding in plain sight: The Ghanian receptacles of proverbs revisited. *RES 55-56 – Absconding, 55/56*(Spring/Autumn), 103–118.

Bonetti, R. (2009b). *Abebuu adekai* chez les Ga du Ghana. Un regard anthropologique sur l'image. In *Histoire de l'art et anthropologie* (pp. 9–18). Paris: coédition INHA/Musée du quai Branly («Les actes»).

Bonetti, R. (2010). Alternate histories of the Abebuu Adekai. *African Arts, 43*(3), 14–33.

Bonetti, R. (2012). Coffins for wear and consumption: Abebuu adekay as memory makers among the Ga of Ghana. *RES 61/62 – Sarcophagy*, (Spring/Autumn), 262–278.

Bonetti, R. (2016). The media-*action* of *abebuu adekai* in the art world market and design. *Cahiers d'Études Africaines. De l'art (d'etre) contemporain, 223*(3), 479–502.

Cole, H. M. (1989). *Icons. Ideals and power in the art of Africa*. Washington, D.C/London: National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution Press.

Daniell, W. F. (1856). On the ethnography of Akkrah and Adampé, Gold Coast, Western Africa. *Journal of Ethnological Society of London, 4*, 1–32.

De Witte, M. (2001). *Long live the dead! Changing funeral celebrations in Asante, Ghana*. Amsterdam: Aksant Academic Publishers.

Engmann, J. (1992). Immortality and the nature of man in Ga thought. In K. Wiredu & K. Gyekye (Eds.), *Person and community* (pp. 153–192). Washington D.C: Ghanian Philosophical Studies.

Ffoulkes, A. (1909). Funeral custom of the Gold Coast colony. *Journal of the Royal African Society, 8*(30), 154–164.

Field, M. J. (1961). *Religion and medicine of Ga people*. London: Oxford University Press.

Firmin-Sellers, K. (1996). *The transformation of property rights in the Gold Coast: An empirical analysis applying rational choice theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gilbert, M. (1994). Aesthetic strategies: The politics of a royal ritual. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, 64*(1), 99–125.

Gilbert, M. (1995). The Christian executioner: Christianity and chieftaincy as rivals. *Journal of Religion in Africa, XXV*(4), 347–386.

Kodzo Paaku Kludze, A. (2000). *Chieftaincy in Ghana*. Lanham/Maryland: Austin & Winfield Publishers.

Larkin, B. (2002). The materiality of cinema theatres in Northern Nigeria. In F. D. Ginsburg, L. Abu-Lughod, & B. Larkin (Eds.), *Media worlds, anthropology on new terrain* (pp. 319–336). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lévi-Strauss, C. (1982). *The way of the masks*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Parker, J. (2000). The cultural politics of death and burial in early colonial Accra. In D. M. Anderson & R. Rathbone (Eds.), *Africa's urban past* (pp. 205–221). Oxford: James Currey.

Quarcoopome, N. O. (2003). Majesteux départs vers l'au-delà. In C. Falgayrettes-Leveau & C. C. Owusu-Sarpong (Eds.), *Ghana hier et aujourd'hui, yesterday and today* (pp. 261–283). Paris: Musée Dapper.

Reindorf Rev, C. C. (1895). *History of the gold coast and asante*. Basel: The Missionsbuchhandlung.

Schmitt, J. C. (2002). *Le corps des images. Essais sur la culture visuelle au Moyen Âge*. Paris: Gallimard.

van der Geest, S. (2000). Funerals for the living: Conversations with elderly people in Kwahu, Ghana. *African Studies Review, 43*(3), 103–129.

Winsnes, S. A. (Ed.). (2009). *Two views from Christianborg castle. Vol. 2. A description of the Guinea coast and its inhabitants by H.C. Monrad*. Legon/Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers.

The Yoruba of Nigeria and the Ontology of Death and Burial

Henri Oripeloye and Morufu Bukola Omigbule

Abstract Death as the terminal point of series of experiences and stretch of existence which mark out every living creature is a phenomenon that has inspired different dispositions among the Yoruba of Nigeria. It is one phenomenon of existence that will continue to elicit many more attitudes since living is an experience in perpetuity among humans. While death remains a fact of life and imposes itself as a recurrent characteristic of all creatures, it often does not come as an experience in homogeneity. Death has different manifestations. And because it brings about the termination of series of experiences of people who have been considered the most rational of all creatures, it is often thought of as the beginning of another stretch of existence. Therefore, the Yoruba, both in their traditional and modern outlooks, have always explained it within their system of apprehending the cosmos. Hence, while birth is seen as the onset of life, death is taken for its termination. Since phenomena of life are meant to be interpreted and measured against human interest, death comes within the life purview of the Yoruba as transition. This perception has been influenced by diverse religious beliefs and cultural norms, though the Yoruba continue to hold on to their traditional cosmological belief in which death is a major factor in the system that the universe is believed to operate. Based on mortality which death encapsulates in living beings or organisms, the Yoruba take the world of humanity for a stage on which humans act different scripts which individual destinies represent. This symbolic way of seeing life has other variants among the Yoruba. In all, death is seen as the definer of human mortality which makes the Yoruba traditional view of life as stage and humans as actors and actresses fundamental bases for elaborate ceremonies that are equal to performances targeted at entertainment. The present study explores the conventional socio-cultural dimensions and the contemporary influences that shape Yoruba thoughts on dying, death and burial.

Keywords Death and burial · Funeral · Cultural realities · Ancestors · Modernity · Yoruba

H. Oripeloye (✉) · M. B. Omigbule
Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
e-mail: oripeloyehenri@gmail.com

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_12

Introduction

The Yoruba people are predominantly found in Nigeria, mainly in the southwestern part of the country. Their splinter populations are in countries of Africa such as Benin Republic, Togo and Ghana. In terms of ethnic grouping in Nigeria, the Yoruba are among the three largest ethnic groups. Yoruba, which is what their language is also called, is one of their main distinguishing characteristics, although within the language are dialectical variations such as Ife, Ekiti, Ondo, Oyo, Ijesa, Ijebu, Akoko, Ikale, Ilaje, and Igbomina among others. In a wider sense, the differences which exist within the Yoruba cultural system account for the complexity in the overall cultural ideology of the Yoruba and this has, in turn, enriched the Yoruba worldview in relation to such experiences as death, initiation, wedding, chieftaincy ceremony, rite of installation of traditional rulers all of which are different rites of transition from one level of existence to another level (Ibitokun 1995).

The Yoruba see death as transition from the realm of the living to the realm of the dead. They see the entire universe as an organic arrangement of existence. Basically, three types of such existence are recognized and each of them is described in relation to the form of beings that are believed to occupy it. There are three realms of existence according to the belief of the Yoruba: the realm of the living, the realm of the dead, and the realm of the unborn (Soyinka 1976). These cosmic arrangements are built on the principle of complementarity such that each realm of existence interconnects with the other and is also interdependent. Death is a significant factor in the interrelationship of the aspects of the universe of the Yoruba mind.

The life of the Yoruba continues to be significantly shaped by age-long beliefs and practices such as the cosmological belief in which death represents a process of transiting from the realm of the living to that of the dead. However, like some other major cultural units in Nigeria, the Yoruba continue to attune their cherished practices to the imperatives of modern times. The Yoruba cultural dispositions to the phenomenon of death are one way in which the Yoruba can be seen to be engaged in old cultural practices and, at the same time, accustomed to the imperatives of modernity. Death is a major existential subject to which the Yoruba traditional wisdom, morality, philosophy and sociology have been focused as a way in which the traditional Yoruba add value to existence. Institutions and mechanisms have been put in place so that the traditional Yoruba would meaningfully apprehend the phenomenon of death in order not to deprive life of meaning. Segun Ogungbemi, in his rationalization of the concept of death, argues that "the issue of death is a phenomenon that generally baffles the imagination of man. Therefore, one should not be surprised to find some similarities in the philosophical assumptions for how it came into being across cultures" (2008, p. 98). All societies have a way of coming to terms with death and there are complexities that emerge in narrations or in apprehension of death which is hinged on their philosophies of life. These philosophies derive from the orientations about life.

Among the Yoruba, there are different myths on the origin of death (*iku)*. One myth says that death was the messenger of *Olodumare* – the Supreme Being in the

Yoruba cosmic understanding – sent to the earth to punish *ese* (sin). This myth has a correlation with the Judeo-Christian precept on death as Christianity holds the view that death is a punishment for sins. Another myth is that in which Death was originally a god that loved human beings and, once in a while, would visit the human society in order to help in solving various problems of life. However, on a particular day, Death appeared and the people he had assisted and would have assisted as usual conspired to murder Death so that they could take his charms in order not to depend on him for any form of assistance. They therefore attacked Death but could not overpower him; it was Death that mauled the majority of them while others ran away but not before Death had prophesied that death would be their heritage. The myth concludes that ever since, human beings have continued to die. Taken together, the two narratives are attempts to explain what seems beyond the epistemological reach of the Yoruba. Of course, myths generally serve such purposes and the core motif of the two myths is that death is an essential part of human nature.

Drawing upon the foregoing myths, the Yoruba show their understanding of the inevitability of death as in several other cultures of the world; they have also come to terms with the agonizing consequences of death. Death is apprehended and explained beyond the agony it inflicts and the many unpleasant experiences it imposes. These two responses to the phenomenon of death can inspire an interesting discourse about death and dying along the doctrinal, the psychological, the philosophical and, the artistic dimensions. The studies of Olupona (1993), Adamolekun (1999), Adeboye (2007) and Adebanwi (2008) present a complex apprehension of death as a physical, spiritual, psychological and physiological essence of human beings. These studies further observe that death transcends the physical, and that the response to death takes on different dimensions or nomenclatures within specific contexts of beliefs and customs. Nevertheless, a common belief of the Yoruba is that behind every death there is an evil force, and this is to the extent that no one dies naturally. There is always a witch, a wizard, gods or spirits that are responsible for death. According to Awolalu, "no matter how long a man lives on earth, the Yoruba still suspect witchcraft or some other evil forces whenever he dies". He adds that such suspicion "is greater still when a youth dies or when an external influence puts an end to life in a violent manner. The death of an aged person is an occasion for rejoicing, whilst that of a young person is a tragedy" (1970, p. 34). The death of a young person causes psychological disorientation, so the cause of the death must be investigated through spiritual means. "There is the tendency for people to search for proper explanations for such "unusual" happenings. They often will look to human enemies, aggrieved ancestors or gods for an answer" (Ogbuagu 1989, p. 88). In eastern Yoruba, especially among the Oka Akoko people, no death is natural; hence serious efforts are devoted to identifying those behind every death. Among these people, there are necromancers who conjure the spirit of the dead in order to reveal the cause of a particular death. It is also a common practice to wash the head of the dead person, the water is either sprinkled on the people or given to members of the immediate family for them to drink as they are the prime suspects. It is believed that this would make whoever is the cause of the death confess. At times, dangerous

objects are buried with the remains to induce the spirit of the dead to revenge (Oripeloye 2016).

While the traditional Yoruba culture may be seen to be culturally prescriptive, its modern version is exactly not. This is because wherever the Yoruba are found today, be it in their predominant location in Nigeria or their locations of splinter populations in some countries of Africa and beyond, they continue to experience the effects of modernity in the form of language change and expiration, changing belief systems, new methods of sheltering and clothing, modern modes of food production and adjusted consumption, and improved transportation. All these changing cultural realities have a lot to do with the phenomenon of death in terms of how it is conceived, how it is reacted to, and how the remains of the dead are treated as opposed to traditional Yoruba ways. The Yoruba continually adjust their traditional practices with modernity. Instances of death and dying as well as events that are connected to them manifest this tension. How this cultural tension is negotiated and the consequence of the negotiation is of scholarly interest. The present discourse of death and dying explores the paradigm of traditional Yoruba culture and critically examines the intersection of the traditional and the modern.

Between Death and Dying

Death and dying are serious issues among the traditional Yoruba. They are heavily referenced in Yoruba oral traditions, particularly in their proverbs which serve as a repository of traditional knowledge. The traditional Yoruba recognize the mortality of humans. Death is an occurrence that put an end to the corporeal existence of man and the Yoruba "believe that death is the transformation of the physical body from the earthly plain. Philosophically, they acknowledge that death is not the end of human life. It is a transitory process to another life where the dead assume a numinous existence that not only endears them to the memory of the living, but also preserves them in the form of a metaphysical essence" (Oripeloye 2016, p. 18). Austine Okwu says that "death is … like puberty, a biological development that should occur according to the chronology of birth. It is not regarded as the end of existence, *but as the rite de passage per excellence*" (italics in the original 1979, p. 20). However, for our purpose, death means the end of corporeal existence. One way the traditional Yoruba face this reality is in their categorization of manners of dying as either bad or good. There are desirable forms of death and undesirable ones. The death of the old and death occasioned by heroic exploits are considered good. An average Yoruba would prefer to die as a hero or heroine even if he/she does not enjoy old age. *Kaku lomode ko ye ni o san ju ka dagba ka ma r'adie irana* (to die honorably as a youth is preferable to dying at an old age without a befitting end). Traditional Yoruba place more premium on dying at an old age rather than through heroic exploits. Efforts are constantly made to ensure that only the aged die and that the youth are prevented from dying an 'untimely' death. Right from childhood, as

early as the eighth day when the naming ceremony of a child is held, the rites have a segment that is devoted to inducing long life and repelling death for the new born.

This rite of inducing long life is an exercise of the spiritual which constitutes a recurrent aspect of the totality of life of the traditional Yoruba. During the naming ceremony, three of the traditional materials for the rite of naming such as water, kolanut and *eda* rat are meant to avert early death for the child. A finger drop of water is put in the child's mouth in symbolic demonstration of what the traditional Yoruba refers to as water of life. The child is then wished a safe life in which water does not gag her/him. He/she is welcome into a society of humans to whom water serves as a life-giver. When the child's tongue is touched with a lobe of kolanut, the Yoruba is fortifying the new born baby against death and invoking long life upon the child thus:

Obi ree o; obi nii bi iku;
obi nii bi arun;
kobi bi iku da nu fun o;
ko bi arun da nu fun o;
iku kii pa awe obi kan;
kan ran bee, aayo t'ofua sile

Translation:

Here is kolanut;
It is the kolanut that wards off death;
It is the kolanut that wards off sicknesses;
May it ward off death and sicknesses from your path in life;
Death does not take the life of a lobe of kolanut;
If it must, it would leave out the Ofua;
May you not be part of those that will die young.

The Yoruba hold a roasted *eda* - a brownish- white specie of rat to invoke long life and fortification against death. *Eku ree o; omo araye o ni da emin re legbodo* (This is *eda* rat, may human beings never cut your life short). And where the Yoruba make this invocation, the echoes of '*ase*' (So shall it be) are resoundingly heard.

The idea of timely death for the Yoruba means dying at a ripe age when an individual has recorded achievements which the Yoruba attach great values to. Such achievements include having children that would carry on with life activities after the death of the individual; leaving behind possessions of value such as farmland, house(s), and clothing; being responsible as a member of a family; being known for upholding truth; having touched the lives of others in major and minor ways; having held an important position in the community; and leaving behind a good name. These values are encapsulated in the Yoruba idea of personhood which signals the kind of death a person will experience and what her/his afterlife experience will be. Personhood is that singular aspiration that makes the life lived by a Yoruba meaningful. In fact, when a person is said to be lacking in personhood, it is implied that he or she is as good as dead. Therefore, the Yoruba could refer to someone who is lacking in good character as: *Ki i se eniyan* (S/he is not a person). The Yoruba word for personhood is *omoluabi*, which, is what everyone must strive for in order to be socially fit in a Yoruba community. When someone exists without meriting

personhood, he/she is referred to as *eranko* (a wild animal). A person without this quality is a social misfit and no Yoruba community accords him or her any form of respect or position of authority or responsibility. How such a social misfit dies and how her/his death is treated depends so much on her or his rating on the scale of personhood.

Dying, death, and how the remains of an individual are treated are of vital importance to the Yoruba. This is not unconnected to how the Yoruba see themselves in relation to the dead. Ancestorhood is a state of being after life which the Yoruba desire as much as they desire personhood while living. These are cultural mechanisms of relating life to death and evaluating earthly existence and other-worldly existence.

> Literally, an ancestor is one from whom a person descends, either by the father or mother, at any distance of time; one's progenitor or forefather. But when the Yoruba speak of the ancestors, they think of the departed spirit of their forebears with whom the living maintains filial and affectionate relationship. It is not every dead person that comes in for consideration. To qualify, such men and women must have lived well, attained an enviable age before dying, must have left behind good children and good memory. Children and youths who die a premature death, barren women, and all who die a 'bad' death – e.g. killed by Ayelala or Sango or Soponno – are excluded from this respectable group (Awolalu 1979, p. 54).

Yoruba also rate death on the scale of trauma, which they consider agonizing. Even when a particular occurrence of death involves an aged person, its traumatic effect is felt. Often, the relations weep, wail, lament, and, reminisce in sobriety. This is usually a result of the emotion of gloom accompanying the vacuum that a particular occurrence of death creates within the bereaved family and the entire community. *Agbalagba nfi iroju re orun, eni ko ki ile, ko k'ona; oju rere l'ofi n lo?* (an old person grimly approaches heaven and you ask him to bear your greetings yonder; do you really think he makes the journey willingly?) (Ibitokun 1995, p. 25). The Yoruba see death as unwelcome. They pray that a particular case of death does not lead to recurrence – *Olorun konii se eleyi ni akufa* (may the Supreme Being never make this case of death a recurrent one). There is no death that is not an occasion for mourning. However, the Yoruba differentiate between wailing and lamentation on the one hand and mortification on the other. In the case of the death of an aged parent or relative, the cause of sadness is the loss of filial relationship between the dead and the living relations. How to finance the burial may be another cause of worry for the surviving relatives upon whom the duty to properly bury the dead rests and for whom there will be public derision in case they fail to accord their departed elders a befitting burial. Nevertheless, there is the happiness that they survive their elders.

The Yoruba investigate cases of death for possible human causes such as acts of witchcraft, wizardry, poison, or uses of powerful charms. They embrace the notion of justice even for the dead. Hence, where it is established that a person is killed by another, the murderer is severely dealt with. A murderer could be made to offer heavy sacrifices as an atonement for the serious misdeed committed not against the dead alone but the community whose life is seen as intertwined with that of every individual, living or dead. Where it is found to be obviously a case of deliberate life

taking, the culprit is usually killed on the order of the king who is believed to embody the supreme mandate of the divine and mundane rulership. In some serious instances, the relatives of the culprits are made to face some serious penalties such as stigmatization, demotion from place of honor to that of outcasts and banishment.

While the Oba (the Yoruba traditional ruler) usually exercises the prerogative of dispensing justice over matters of death by way of punishment or compensation, there are established ritual institutions and procedures for attending to the remains of the dead. For instance, among the people of Ile-Ife, the remains of those who die through thunder strikes, and the death of the hunchback, the lame, victims of chicken-pox and smallpox are attended to by the Oranfe ritual institution; remains from death by hanging are treated by the Obameri ritual institution (Omigbule 2014, p. 239).

Death is not considered the annihilation of being, and burial rites and ceremonies facilitate a smooth transition from the realm of the living to that of the dead. This Yoruba notion of death shares some correlation with Allan Anderson's explanation that death "is perceived as the beginning of a person's deeper relationship with all creation, the complementing of life and the beginning of the communication between the visible and the invisible worlds" (2003, p. 9). Beyond this, Dopamu's confirmation of the Yoruba belief in the hereafter indicates a similar belief about death:

> The soul is an invisible entity representing an unborn invisible baby in heaven. It is the entity that appears before *Olodumare*, the Supreme being, to receive the destiny that an individual will come into the world to fulfil. Secondly, the soul (personality-soul), still invisible, animates the body of a visible human being on earth and pervades it with life. Thirdly, at death the soul, again invisible, departs from the body and represents the dead person before *Olodumare,* for judgment (Dopamu 2006, p. 3).

Even if an aged individual is about to die, the Yoruba feel unease. How can it then be explained that the death of an aged Yoruba which eventually will culminate in celebrations could have first been prevented by whatever means? *Bi a ba n ja, bii ti ka ku ko* (Even if we are quarreling, death is not what we should wish each other). Since death is inevitable, the challenge it poses to the living is faced in many ways.

Burial Rites and Funerals

Burial ceremony is one of such ways by which the impact of death is mediated among the Yoruba. For the bereaved, the departure of a dear one brings emotional trauma. The burial ceremony becomes an occasion of hope during which the living and the dead and even the unborn are believed to be united in a ceremony that brings psychological relief in addition to enhancing physiological balance. It is an occasion for demonstrating the belief that death for the Yoruba is not the termination of existence or end of life – the "annihilation of being" (Ibitokun 1995, p. 21). "The Yoruba, like any other Africans, believe in the active existence of the deceased

ancestors. They know that death does not write *finis* to human life but that the earthly life has been extended into the life beyond – into that place which is believed to be the abode of the departed souls" (Awolalu 1979, p. 53).

This belief system is a matter of spiritual-cum-moral obligation to be held sacrosanct. When a baby or a young adolescent dies, or when a person drowns or falls off a tree, the burial is done without any fanfare. If it is a case of a pregnant woman, the designated traditional undertakers will take the remains to the forest where the fetus will be removed before the burial because it is a taboo to the god of the earth to have both the mother and child buried together. This is done amidst a series of rites in order to prevent a recurrence. When it is death by suicide, there are rituals to be performed before the burial of the remains, because such remains are ordinarily unwelcome to the realm of the dead where the deceased is expected to continue a different form of existence. The burial of a person who commits suicide can only be done by designated traditional undertakers. It should be noted, however, that traditionally prescribed suicides such as the ritual suicide of Sarun in Ile-Ife or Abobaku in Oyo as well as suicide compelled by warriors' ethics in the Yoruba heroic ages does not belong in this category of undesirable deaths. The Sarun and the Abobaku are supposed to be every close aides of the Ooni and the Alaafin respectively. The death of either of them through suicide is to create an easy passage for the spirit of a deceased Ooni or Alaafin as the case may be. In a similar sense, a "warrior in the heroic ages" (Ogundele 1994, p. 49) of the Yoruba could opt for suicide where and when his or her personhood was endangered by a dishonorable act of commission or omission. Suicide in cases like these was a traditional obligation which qualified the victim of suicide to be considered as a worthy ancestor.

There are also deaths associated with professionals such as those who are into Ifa divination and hunting. When a hunter dies, the death is announced by the booming of guns, and *iremoje* performance is associated with the burial which is handled by the group of hunters to which the deceased belonged. Hunters are not ordinary persons in the society as they possess both political and spiritual powers; therefore, the ritual of *isipa* is done to send the spirit away from the midst of the hunters. In the *isipa*, the charms of the deceased hunter are gathered and taken to the bush where his bravery will be celebrated and the potency of the charms would be destroyed through rendition of incantation that would dig into the mystery behind the charms. Closely related to this is the burial of blacksmiths, *ogun* worshippers and those who trade in metals.

It is a taboo to say that the king is dead among the Yoruba; instead, the transition is couched in euphemistic statements such as *Oba waja*, (the king has gone to the attic) or *erin wo* (the elephant has fallen). Going by tradition, the death of the king is kept as a secret until certain rituals are performed. In most places, the main market is shut and some trees in the market are cut down. Only the initiates such as the *ogboni* are involved in the burial. In Ile-Ife, a place popularly regarded as the cradle of the Yoruba, when an Ooni joins his ancestors, the burial rites are kept secret from everyone including the family of the deceased Ooni. The *onisooro* who are the designated ritual performers in Ile-Ife superintend the rites. They take exclusive custody of the remains in order to perform specific rites. Whatever happens during this

burial process is only known to the initiates to whom the secret acts are an exclusive preserve. In some other Yoruba communities, especially among the eastern Yoruba such as the Owo and Akoko, the body of the king is not buried as a whole as some parts of the body, such as the head and the heart are ripped out for specific ritual purposes. The remaining parts are further cut into chunks and buried at specific points, especially at the entrances of the town. The remains of a deceased Ooni of Ife is said to be buried in major Yoruba towns since his kingdom is believed to extend beyond Ile-Ife which is regarded as the foundation of other towns in Yorubaland.

The grave for the remains of an aged person is dug by the relations of the deceased. In some Yoruba communities, it is the responsibility of the in-laws (if there are any) to dig the grave. The lifeless body is washed and wrapped with cloths provided by the children and other relations. Usually, the cloths from the relations are chosen before that of the eldest child and when there are too many cloths, only seven pieces of cloth are allowed for the burial while the remaining ones are kept by the relations of the deceased. After the burial, a cock is sacrificed on the grave of the deceased in the case of a male and a hen in the case of a female. The bird would be cooked and shared among those present at the burial. The children are expected to sleep in the house for a minimum of five days in some Yoruba communities after the burial. Among the Ijebu people of Ogun State, three days are set apart for the burial and each day marks a special event as the dead is being transmitted to the world of the ancestors. There are specific events for the day of the funeral. Margaret Drewal (1992) notes that the main funeral day is *ojo isinku* (day of burial), the third day is *ita oku* (a day of feasting), the fourth day is *irenoku* (performance for the dead) and the seventh day is *eje oku* (celebration of the dead). Every community or household has its own burial rites. Although they may not be significantly different from one community to another, there are certain rites that are performed to introduce the dead to the world of ancestors which are done according to the tradition of specific households. In Akoko, after the burial, the fifth day is set aside for washing the cloth of the deceased; male family members also cut their hair while the female plait theirs as marks of honor for the departed. On the eighth day, a feast is organized. In Ora-Igbomina, the eldest child provides the coffin while the youngest child is responsible for the burial cloth and the burial spans six days – from Monday, when there would be various performances, to Saturday, when the burial is finally done. In Ijesaland, *omolayole* dance is staged to announce the death of a person; this at times involves the carrying of the corpse or a picture of the deceased round the community in a dance procession. The body is thereafter buried somewhere around the house or inside the house in a symbolic acknowledgement of the presence of the dead among the living relatives. Every Yoruba community adheres to the tradition of burying their dead at home except when it is absolutely impossible. Among the Ile-Ife people, *ekun ooro* (early morning weeping) is a form of funeral for a woman, often, this form of funeral has to do with the women in specific extended families of the deceased woman who live within the same compounds. Though the word *ekun ooro* literally means early morning funeral that involves weeping, in actual fact, it may not involve weeping. What is central to this act of honoring the memory of a

deceased is the coming together of her children before the other women in the family who must organize a feast for their mother's co-wives within the extended family circle. The extended family hall called *akodi* is usually the venue for *ekun ooro.* The memories of the deceased are recalled and there are songs in admiration the children of the deceased who double as the sponsors of the event. This is done amidst feasting and dancing.

Like burials, there are diverse funerals among the Yoruba. Drewal observes that "the circumstances of death, its perceived causes, the age and social as well as religious affiliations of the deceased all are taken into account as a family decides what type of funeral to perform" (1992, p. 38). Some funerals span weeks of celebration while some are concluded within hours or a day. What matters in most cases is the economic strength of the offspring in relation to the social status of the deceased. It is the duty of the children and relations to give a befitting funeral to the dead. At times it may take years before this preparation is completed. It is mandatory for the children to do the funeral of their parents when they die at old age as this is perceived as one of the final steps that will take them to ancestorhood. Those who die without leaving children behind or whose children are still very young are mourned by family members but there is no ceremony to mark their demise. The social importance of children, as far as Yoruba burial is concerned, is made known in the Yoruba maxim: *Eni omo sin ni o bi'mo* (only a person that a child buries has truly begotten a child). It is therefore a source of worry for adults who are yet to have their own children as they are bound to think of what will become of them at death.

Funeral arrangements are usually a collective assignment. They are not left for the family members or the bereaved alone as many outside the family and the bereaved contribute to making a funeral a success. Each relation has specific contributions to the funeral. In earlier days, people would come together to tap wine from the palm trees, gather firewood, and fetch water among other necessities for holding a particular funeral ceremony. Members of the age grade to which the children of the deceased belong spearheaded most of the activities involved in the funeral. There are so many assignments that there is a no way only family members of the deceased can carry them out. Though the occasion of a funeral inspires the spirit of communality, the level of participation of the community depends on the goodwill that the deceased and his children have been able to command within the community.

Those who may not have enough money might have to borrow in order to meet their traditional obligations. In some instances, funerals have had to be delayed for months or years to enable the family to raise enough money for elaborate funerals. People ask for assistance from family members who live in the cities and overseas, especially if they were very close to the deceased during her or his lifetime. Often, such relations contribute meaningfully to funeral arrangements and, at times, become the showpiece of the elaborate event. Daniel Smith provides additional insights into the involvement of such relations by saying that "the reasons it is important for relatives in the city and overseas to return home for a burial are manifold. In addition to emotional ties, chief among the pragmatic social explanations

are the prestige that their presence provides the family and the resources they are expected to contribute" (2004, p. 572).

The funeral has both a social and spiritual significance. It marks the final effort at sending the spirit of the deceased to the realm of the ancestors and there is the belief that anyone whose funeral is not properly done becomes a roaming spirit around the world. Everyone struggles to make sure that the funeral of family members who died at old age are celebrated. In eastern Yoruba, it becomes a form of indebtedness when one fails to do the funeral of one's parents and tradition demands that the debt must be inherited by the children of the man or woman who could not do his parents the honor (Oripeloye 2016). A funeral properly done allows the dead to enjoy a good relationship with the living. In some Yoruba communities, a funeral is referred to as the second burial in which all the rites that were not done during the burial are re-enacted in order to bring to a close the life cycle of the dead as well as the initiation of another.

However, in recent times, the attitude of Yoruba to death and burial has changed. In earlier days it was not common to see human corpses abandoned on the streets, but arising from individualism orchestrated by capitalism, corpses of humans at the mercy of dogs and vultures have become common sights. It could be argued that a process of human debasement is ongoing in Yoruba 'postmodern' cities where everyone appears to mind his or her own business. Burial rites in Yoruba land have also undergone certain fragmentation as a result of modernization. There have been cases of traditional rulers whose death tradition forbids its announcement until the lapsing of certain periods when necessary rites would have been carried out. Such instances of death are made public through semiotic connotations such as the closing of major markets in the town and cutting off of the trunk or branches of some specific trees in and around the town. But since some Yoruba traditional rulers die in hospitals which, at times, are in foreign lands, their deaths can no longer be made a secret, especially with the influences of the social media. There are also instances where families of traditional rulers would refuse to release the corpses of their sires for proper traditional burials in a kind of questioning the tradition of the people. When it happens this way, it has serious consequences as the society has a way of fighting back in reaction to such challenge against tradition. On many occasions, tragic death and sickness are used to torment such errant families. In some other instances, the seriousness with which death and burial were attended has been downplayed by cosmetic attachments so that the rites that were integral parts of such burial are now taken for granted. One example of this is the trado-conventional practice of burying the dead at home which is no longer compulsory; people bury their dead wherever they prefer. Christianity as an agent of modernization also has an overwhelming influence on Yoruba culture of death and burial so that most of the sacred rituals and beliefs attached to burial rites are seen as forms of profanity. Nowadays, the idea of suspending funeral for a time in the future has been discouraged by Christianity to the extent that if some family members are attuned to this form of funeral, Christians among them will not participate because of their religious belief. In Yoruba towns and villages, modernity has influenced funeral choices in terms of material culture which makes the production and distribution of gifts

items a necessity to shore up the social status of both the dead and the bereaved and the "funerals are sometimes held like ceremonies and not sacred moments" (Ranger 2011, p. 63). In addition, funeral ceremonies are being done in line with the preferences of modern times. This puts a lot of pressure, financial and otherwise, on the immediate family of the bereaved as well as the extended family members, as costs of such undertakings as newspaper announcements of the obituary and printing of posters and program of events for the funeral, radio and television announcements are incurred. The hallmark of the contemporary funeral is the entertainment of the guests in terms of food, drinks and music at the venue of the reception which include the social status of the musicians.

Conclusion

Right from the "pre-life" stage (when every individual is believed to exist in the realm of the unborn) through the stage of life (when all exist as humans on the terrestrial plane and are believed to be living specific destinies) to death (when an individual is expected to be transiting to ancestral hood after a life well lived), the Yoruba see life as a stage upon which a complex drama of existence takes place. The Yoruba use the word *Oja* (market) as a metaphor to capture the kind of dramatic experience that the world of humans approximates.

Before actual life on the terrestrial plane, the Yoruba believe that an individual appears before the *Orisanla* for the selection of her/his destiny. An individual's destiny represents the script which he/she would act on the stage of life. This drama does not end as a drama of life alone since other acts take place in the two other realms. A Yoruba who died a good death is expected to play useful roles in the affairs of the living just like the gods of the Yoruba with whom the 'distinguished' dead inhabit the realm of the dead. At the same time, the dead who could come back to join the living as a reincarnate would have to go through the realm of the unborn to be able to cross over to the realm of the living and live life all over again. Otherwise, the dead can only pay occasional visits to the living not as full humans or bona fide members of the living but as spiritual entities. The world of the living is actually the market which the Yoruba hold as accommodating all forms of life. Whether a human comes back to the realm or world of the living or not, the acting continues, the trading sustains the hurly-burly of the market. The Yoruba often reduce death to an occasion for merrymaking in line with their philosophical estimation of life as drama, and every human as an actor/actress. Therefore, if an occasion of death calls for singing, dancing, drumming, eating, drinking and other forms of entertainment, it is that the Yoruba believe that death has "not annihilated" the being in question but rather terminated her/his line of acting on the stage of life. Therefore, disposing off the remains of the deceased through burial rites and celebrating death by way of funeral rites and ceremonies amount to marking the exit of an actor/actress after his/her successful and enviable participation in the drama of life.

References

Adamolekun, K. (1999). Bereavement salutations among the Yorubas of Western Nigeria. *Omega, 39*(4), 227–285.

Adebanwi, W. (2008). Death, national memory and the social construction of heroism. *The Journal of African History, 49*(3), 419–444.

Adeboye, O. (2007). *Iku Ya J'esin:* Politically motivated suicide, social honor, and chieftaincy politics in early colonial Ibadan. *Canadian Journal of African Studies, 41*(2), 189–225.

Anderson, A. (2003). African religions. In R. Kastenbaum (Ed.), *Macmillan encyclopedia of death and dying* (pp. 9–13). New York: The Gale Group.

Awolalu, O. (1970). The Yoruba philosophy of life. *Presence Africaine, 73*, 20–38.

Awolalu, O. (1979). *Yoruba beliefs and sacrificial rites*. Brooklyn: Athelia Henrietta Press.

Dopamu, Ade (2006). Change and continuity: The Yoruba belief in life after death. Paper delivered at "Continuity and change: Perspectives on science and religion conference", (June 3–7) Philadelphia, PA, USA.

Drewal, M. (1992). *Yoruba ritual: Performers, play, agency*. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Ibitokun, B. M. (1995). *African drama and the Yoruba world-view*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

Ogbuagu, S. (1989). The changing perception of death and burial: A look at the Nigerian obituaries. *Anthropologica, 31*(1), 85–101.

Ogundele, W. (1994). A poet's quarrel with his culture. *Research in African Literature, 25*(1), 47–60.

Ogungbemi, S. (2008). Death: A moral issue. In S. Ogungbemi (Ed.), *God, reason and death: Issues in philosophy of religion* (pp. 96–111). Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Okwu, A. (1979, Autumn). Life, death, reincarnation, and traditional healing in Africa. *Issue: A Quarterly Journal of Africanist Opinion, 9*(3), 19–24.

Olupona, Jacob (1993, September). The study of Yoruba religious tradition in historical perspective. *Numen, 40*(3), 240–273.

Omigbule, Morufu (2014). A poetics of selected ritual festivals in Ile-Ife. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

Oripeloye, H. (2016). Aesthetics of funeral performance in Oka-Akoko, Ondo State. *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa, 13*, 17–29.

Ranger, T. (2011). A decent death: Changes in funerary rites in Bulawayo. In M. Jindra & J. Noret (Eds.), *Funerals in Africa: Explorations of a social phenomenon* (pp. 41–68). New York: Berghahn.

Smith, D. (2004). Burials and belonging in Nigeria: Rural-urban relations and social inequality in contemporary African ritual. *American Anthropologist, 106*(3.) (September), 567–579.

Soyinka, W. (1976). *Myth, literature and the African world*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Transformation of Funeral Rituals in Togo

Jacek Jan Pawlik

Abstract The article presents changes in the funeral rituals in Togo, which have been taking place since colonial times under the influence of technology and the spread of Christianity. The author relates to changes concerning the time and place of burial, the attitude to experiencing mourning and the change of final references resulting from one's worldview convictions. From strictly defined ritual sequences, the funeral rituals turn into a kind of performance emphasizing the aesthetic and communal aspect. The emphasis shifts from good death to a beautiful funeral, the high price of which is paid by the relatives of the deceased. However, this is not wasted money, because it is not only about preserving the good image of the deceased, but also protecting family honor and social solidarity.

Keywords Death · Funeral rites · Mourning · Togo · Cultural change

Funeral rites belong to the richest ritual complex celebrated in Africa. Because of the cultural and ethnic diversity of Togo, there is a wide range of specific festivals and rituals. However, regardless of cultural affiliation, the funeral celebrations marking the last stage of life take on a form of obligatory ritual practices with religious and aesthetic as well as psychological and social significance.

From the anthropological point of view, the death of a given person can be analyzed on three levels. On the level of social characters one finds the dying, his family and friends, then specialists caring for the dying person at home or in the hospital and preparing the body for funeral and burial. The second level concerns standards, institutions and skills. On the one hand, it contains techniques and economic issues related to the funeral, and on the other hand, legal and ethical issues arising from regulations and customary norms as well as religious beliefs. On the third level there is a metaphysical reference system: faith in the ultimate things, ideas about

J. J. Pawlik (✉)
University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Olsztyn, Poland
e-mail: jacek.pawlik@uwm.edu.pl

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_13

deities and concepts of the human person, especially the layout and meaning of one's spiritual components.

We find all these three levels in the broadly understood funeral rituals, which include a set of ritualistic activities extending from agony to the end of mourning. Their main purpose is to help the deceased to reach a condition recognized by the people at large as final, to assist close relatives and other mourners in the "work" of mourning, and, especially in the lineage communities, to restore to the social group of the deceased a balance that could be shaken by the death of one of its members. Along with the development of civilization and changes of beliefs related to worldview, there will also be changes in the intensity of expression, in giving of meaning, in involvement, in skipping or adding ritual sequences and in the entire setting of rituals. These changes took on a distinct pace with the advent of the colonial era, the development of communication networks and the introduction of new technologies. The spread of Christianity and Islam also played a significant role. Nevertheless, the transformations did not take place uniformly. First of all, they covered urban centers, especially those that were in continuous contact with Europeans. Similarly, traditional practices, though naturally resistant to change, were modified, albeit to varying degrees, under the influence of modernity. Even if they kept the form unchanged, often simplified, they usually changed their common meaning.

This article presents the transformation of funeral rituals in Togo. It is a small country with an area of 56,000 km^2, located in West Africa between Ghana and Benin. Initially a German colony, Togo was divided into British and French protectorates, the latter of which gained independence in 1960 as the Togolese Republic. According to the 2010 population census, the country has 6,191,155 inhabitants, including 60% under 25 years of age (Recensement 2010). The life expectancy for women is 64.2 years and for men is 56.4 (Badohoun 2016, p. VI). The Togo population consists of over 30 ethnic groups, of which Ewe and Kabre are the most numerous.

We begin by focusing on the period starting with the Europeans. This does not mean that before the colonial period, Togo and its individual ethnic groups had no experience of outside influence. This is pointed out by Charles Piot (Piot 1999) regarding the region inhabited by the Kabre in northern Togo, stressing that for centuries even the smallest villages had been included in the regional or even global system of exchange and influence. Nevertheless, colonization and its consequences clearly accelerated the process of borrowings, providing tools and means of change and proposing a new worldview. In contact with Europe, a city lifestyle emerged, first adopted by the local elites and foreigners living in Togo, imitated by popular masses depending on the possibilities and resources they had. Urban patterns were gradually transferred inland with the opening of new or improved communication routes.

Christianity played a significant role in the changes of funeral rituals. The infiltration of Christianity in Togo was relatively slow. The first Catholic mission in the center of the country was founded in 1912, but after a few years it was closed down. Another attempt of 1926, connected with the founding of the mission in Tchitchao, was of lasting success (Müller 1968, pp. 120–121). Since 1937 Protestants have been running schools in Pya, Landa and Niamtougou.

We should also remember the centuries-old presence of Islam in the north of Togo, introduced by Hausa merchants. When Christianity reached the north, two ethnic groups, namely Anufo and Tem, were in better part already Islamized. In addition to the above-mentioned ethnic territories, Muslims in Togo live in clusters constituting districts of large towns called *zongo*. The presence of Muslim families in the rural environment should also be noted. An interesting case about the spread of religion concerns the Assemblies of God. The first congregation of this neo-Pentecostal denomination was instituted in northern Togo, in Dapaong, in 1936, founded by missionaries from Upper Volta (today Burkina Faso). The development of the church network did not take place like in other churches from south to north, but from north to south. The Assemblies of God are the most dynamic neo-Pentecostal church in Togo today, embracing with its influence all of West Africa (Noret 2004c: 76).

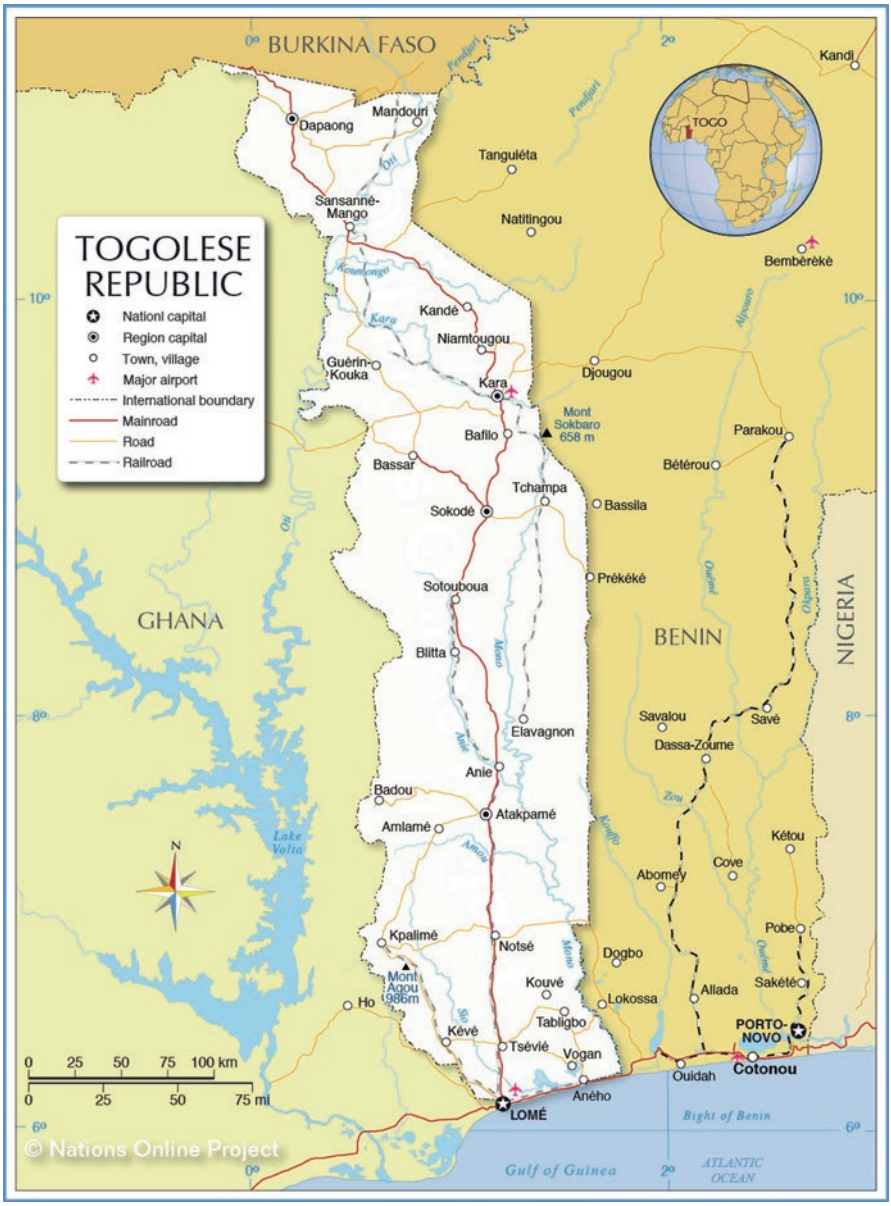
Principles and requirements of the new religions initially had a moderate impact on funeral practices. Islam easily introduced a simplified burial, especially that the circle of its followers was limited to the two mentioned ethnic groups and foreigners. In addition, it did not fight those elements of a traditional burial, which it considered to be customary. Neo-Pentecostal denominations demanded a break with tradition, sanctioning the non-compliance with temporary or permanent exclusion from the community. In the case of Catholics and Protestants, traditional beliefs were respected, allowing traditional ceremonies in conjunction with a Christian celebration if the family was multi-religious.

However, it was not the presence and requirements of foreign religious instances that had a decisive influence on the change of funeral practices. An important catalyst for the changes was the migration to the capital of people from all over the country in search of a job. Massively, a wave of immigrants from the north followed along with the policy of sustainable development of General Eyadéma, who promoted in the state administration people from the Kabre, Moba, Nawdeba and others. The Lomé (the capital city) environment was conducive to conversion to Christianity, which was connected with a new worldview, but above all allowed for a quick takeover of new lifestyles associated with modernity.

The main part of external influences always passes through urban agglomerations, which are in a sense, cultural mediators for rural communities spontaneously or in an orderly manner (Gayibor 2005, pp. 448). The ease of adaptation of new techniques will depend on the economic situation, the permeability of diffusion channels and the main routes of communication. As long as most of the villages remained isolated, far from the main communication routes, the ritual innovations of Lomé did not have much impact. With the development of roads, school networks, radio and television, and above all mobile telephony, the situation changed radically.

Technical progress characterizing modernity brought a new attitude to time and space. This manifested itself in the acceleration of time and in opening the space while shortening the distance. From pedestrian caravans along the route of kola [an African tree whose nuts contain caffeine and theobromine] from Kano in Nigeria through Togo to Salaga in Ghana, after passing the same route on an asphalt road,

travel time and comfort changed radically. The mobility of people in search of work, study or visit is unmatched in history. However, the most rapid change occurred in the field of communication. A message that sometimes took several weeks to reach to the addressee, today thanks to telephony is transmitted within a fraction of a second. All this has an impact on the form, content and meaning of funeral rites, while at the same time putting new, unprecedented challenges.



Funeral Time

Tradition glorifies the death of an elderly man, after a short illness that will allow children to gather around a dying parent. A similar situation was possible in lineage societies, when the family lived in a limited space, and a significant part of it in the house of the father and grandfather. Modern reality, however, is less and less conducive to fulfilling similar conditions. Mass migrations from villages to cities, in the case of Togo mainly to the capital, cause the family to be dispersed. With the widening of health care facilities, more and more people are dying in the hospital. Of course, a part of the family is watching over the patient, but usually it is hospital staff who is most often a witness to the death. In addition, more and more diseases of civilization and road accidents cause an increase in sudden deaths. The traditional stories, for example of the Bassari people proclaim that, at one time, the old man was able to predict the time of death (Pawlik 1990, p. 57), but today it is impossible.

At the moment of death, codified practices were used that prescribed sequences of ritualistic activities on successive days: announcing death, sending messages, gathering mourners, isolating the widow, preparing the body for the funeral, watching the dead, burial, greetings and condolences, curing the grave . All this took place at a rapid pace, because the body had to be buried, at the latest, 24 h after death. Today, a similar procedure can still be found in remote and isolated villages, where there are no material resources to use technical capabilities.

In the urban environment, a person usually dies in hospital. The body of the deceased is placed in the hospital morgue till the funeral is prepared. This is one of the essential features of change: control over time by separating the time of death from the time of funeral. So the time between death and burial is prolonged, and simultaneously the synchronization of ritual sequences is disturbed. There is no waiting for the announcement of death, especially because the media facilitate the sending of messages. Radio is used first and most often, since it provides for a special airtime for funeral announcements, both in local and national stations. Announcements of this type can also be found on television. The press is also full of obituaries. When the family members and friends hear about the death, they hurry to submit the mourners' condolences waiting for the date of the funeral.

The family and relatives gather to set the date of the funeral. Time is taken into account that will enable all close relatives, also those who live abroad, to come. Preparations also apply to the house of mourning, renewing (repairing and refreshing paint), cleaning, etc. One has to foresee the entertainment of guests, the rental of appropriate equipment, and above all, to find funds to cover costs.

Postponement of the funeral day is associated with rising expenses. The price of storing the bodies in the morgue per day increases with the length of storage time. In addition, one has to pay for services and formalin - a preservative. In Lomé, competing funeral businesses deal with funeral matters. They are poorly represented in the interior of the country. Usually those outside of Lomé who have financial resources order services from Lomé. Mostly, they rent only a caravan. A funeral

home offers a wide range of services. The family, depending on their financial options, chooses one of the sets of services that they want to use. The proposed services are as follows: renting chairs and a canopy, under which a funeral vigil is organized, renting a caravan that will transport the body from the morgue to the house and then to the cemetery, preparing the body, clothing of the deceased, buying a coffin, hiring the sound system and lighting, fanfare, decoration, and sometimes even renting dishes for refreshments. Depending on the order, the price can range from around US$1000 to $4000.

The ability to store a body and the extensive services rendered by funeral homes do not mean that everyone at Lomé uses these facilities. Often, in the suburbs, which until recently were villages, and in the Lomé folk districts, the funeral takes place, at the latest, 48 h after death. The body is stored next to the house in a toilet area using some traditional body maintenance treatments. There are many reasons that families do not use the morgue in the hospital. First of all, there are economic reasons. Many families cannot afford to pay for the morgue, especially because they have difficulties with feeding their own members. There are also emotional reasons: the desire to end the ambivalent situation caused by death as soon as possible. In the end, we must mention the reasons resulting from religious beliefs, for example, in case of the death of a vodun [voodoo] adept, which must be freed from the presence of the deity. The task of preparing the body for the funeral is entrusted to traditional specialists who have acquired skills within an ethnic group.

The case of funerals for Muslims is similar. According to the tradition of Islam, the deceased is buried as soon as possible after death, preferably on the same day. In Lomé, after praying over the body, it is transported, deposited in a coffin by a rented caravan from the house or from the morgue to a Muslim cemetery. Before being put into the grave, the body is removed from the coffin and placed in a grave wrapped in a white shroud. Ceremonies are presided over by imams, who say appropriate prayers. If there is a mosque on the way, before the funeral procession goes to the cemetery, it stops for prayers in the mosque. Muslims pray for the deceased on the seventh and fortieth day after death and on the first anniversary. Nowadays there is a tendency to limit the prayers to one commemoration, usually on the fortieth day after death.

If the body rests in the morgue, one can freely set the date of the funeral. Most often, Friday or Saturday is chosen for practical reasons. It makes it easier for those who come from far away and need permission from their workplace. The inhabitants of Lomé, even if they go to the funeral in the morning, can return to their activities during the day. In the evening before the funeral, a special funeral vigil is organized at home and in principle in front of the house. Because of the number of participants, guests gather under a provisional roofing set on the street and occupy space on prepared chairs. At a certain time, the funeral vigil starts. Prayers are intertwined with the singing of invited chorales and the music of artistic bands. At about midnight, a coffin is brought from the morgue with the body of the deceased. This time, prayers and chants follow each other in the presence of the body. Relatives express their sorrow, others express respect to the deceased. Those present are served with sweets and drinks so that they will not dry out in their throats while

singing. Nowadays, there is a tendency to shorten an all-night vigil. A prayer meeting is organized for a few hours in the evening, but it ends before midnight and the body is brought in only the next morning for the funeral. Atiyihwè Awesso points out that the funeral watch now has a tendency to fade (Awesso 2007, p. 257), but so far they are very popular.

In Lomé there is a custom (spread to the rest of the country) that the family of the deceased during the funeral rites has the same clothes, made of the same material, often with a pre-printed portrait of the deceased. Depending on their wealth, they are simple or more fancy according to the latest fashion or even initiating new models. It is an honor if someone can say that such and such cut appeared for the first time at the funeral of this deceased.

The next morning, from the house of mourning, a funeral procession sets off with the body of the deceased going to church or assembly for a specific hour to worship. For Catholics this is the Holy Mass. The procession can take the following form: in front there is a portrait or photograph of the deceased, then a cross and optionally incense. Next, the coffin is taken with the deceased, and mourners and others taking part in the funeral follow after it. After the funeral Mass, the retinue goes to the cemetery, where the deceased is buried. After the funeral, the participants in the ceremony go to the house of mourning, in which they will make official condolences to the mourners. The hosts will invite guests for a meal. This scheme of the ceremony corresponds to the situation when the deceased is a Christian. If the deceased was not baptized, the station in the church is omitted, and the ceremonies are presided over by appropriate specialists.

Traditional religions are governed by their own logic and the time accumulation of rituals is not customary. After the rituals connected with the burial, there is a period of mourning, so that after one or two years it will end the ritual cycle by solemnly leaving the mourning. Among the Ewe people, there is celebration of ending the period of mourning known as *adeloutou*; it is usually celebrated one year after death. It begins with a night vigil, after which the traditional ceremony and religious worship take place the next morning (if the family is divided in religious terms). The reception begins in the afternoon when participants, gathered around small tables, eat. There is contemporary, religious or traditional music (accompanied by drums). Some people dance. At the moment of leaving, everyone puts a donation on the table and signs the list, indicating the sum offered (Comhaire-Sylvain 1982, p. 235). In other ethnic groups, the ending of mourning may take on a more spectacular form. Among the Bassari, for example, the full ritual cycle extends over 7 days. It is believed that through the diligent fulfillment of these ordinances, the deceased obtains the dignity of an ancestor.

In the urban environment in Lomé, at least the Christians developed the custom of ordering a special thanksgiving Mass on the Sunday following the funeral. All participants from the funeral are invited. This is the official closure of the funeral cycle. No other gatherings or ceremonies are planned, although some families take care to order Mass for the deceased on the 40th day after death or on its anniversary.

Burial Place

As already mentioned, fewer and fewer people die in their own house. This results not only from the availability of medical care, but above all from mass migrations from villages to cities, in the case of Togo mainly to the capital, Lomé, which, together with the suburbs, is inhabited by a quarter of the population. In the case of death outside the home, there are two options: meeting the requirement of tradition by bringing the body to its place of origin and burying it there or burying it in the place of residence in Lomé. The first option entails additional costs to pay for transport; the second one demands the removal of the deceased's hair and nails, transporting them to a family village for burial in the native land. The decision, as always in such cases, will belong to the family. Everything will depend on the ties that the deceased had with the place of origin, which could express the desire to be buried at home. It is also important if there are still family members there. The cost of transportation is also a significant factor.

The place of burial is probably the most complex issue in funeral rituals. Assuming the perspective coming out of the capital of the country towards the interior, the incumbent inhabitants of Lomé bury their dead in the city's cemeteries. Within the city limits there is a municipal cemetery in the Bè-Kpota district, opened in the 1970s. The cemetery is divided into sectors corresponding to the religion of the deceased. In the Old Town, there exists a so-called cemetery on the beach founded in the times of the German colony. Occasional funerals are also held there, provided that relatives already have a place or a family tomb. Because of the lack of space, it is not possible to set up a new grave. A similar situation exists at the cemetery in Bé-Camalodo. Peripheral districts and suburban towns have their own cemeteries, which are managed by local chiefs, for example cemeteries in Yokoè, Sogbassito, Agbalépédogan, and Djidjolé. There are also small cemeteries in places of the city, where there used to be villages. Muslims have two main cemeteries: Adidogomé and Adétikopé. In the municipal cemetery, the price of the grave is about 150 US$. A place in other cemeteries is cheaper.

However, Lomé and the surrounding areas are just a small part of Togo. In the southern part of the country, settlements have their own cemeteries, in which they bury the dead in individual graves. Once, among the Ewe people, the custom of burial in homes was widespread (Spieth 2009, p. 277). Today this custom has disappeared. The further north one goes, the more complex the situation is. In larger towns there are cemeteries. However, administrative pressure to bury the dead in a cemetery, not in homes, has existed for only 30 years. This does not mean that cemeteries did not exist before. They existed in each village, a smaller or larger cluster of graves in a given area. Nevertheless, the head of the family and his wife were buried at home or inside the farm, as was the case of women among the Bassari people (Pawlik 1990).

Detailed information on graves and burial methods in ancient times is provided by Leo Frobenius (1913). It is worth taking a quick look at, for example, information about the burial of the people of northern Togo. Frobenius focuses on the forms

of graves and the way of burial. The Tamberma people have a custom of digging a deep vertical shaft from which two lateral niches are drilled. In one of them a man is buried, resting on the left side with his face turned to the east and in the other niche a woman is buried, resting on the right side with her face turned to the west. It is a collective tomb, because the next deceased is placed in the same grave on the bones of predecessors. The shaft is closed with a flat stone and sealed with clay (Frobenius 1913, p. 342).

A similar way of burying the dead, yet with some differences, is used by the Nawdeba and Kabre people. The Kabre laid subsequent dead in the same grave, as did the Tamberma (Frobenius 1913: 409–410). The Nawdeba, after the decomposition of the body, drew out bones and placed them in a separate grave making an ossarium (Frobenius 1913, pp. 372–373). The Kabre put a mound 50–75 cm above the closed grave, a practice which Frobenius does not mention among their neighbors.

The Moba, Bassari and Konkomba buried the dead in individual graves. These graves resemble a cavity or flattened pear. The entrance to the grave had a diameter of several inches, a meter and a half below, widened and formed a niche, in which the body of the deceased could be folded freely in the embryonic position.

The dead were buried naked, only a scrap of veils covered their genitals. The body was carefully prepared by ablutions and rubbed mainly with shea butter. All these peoples had a common burial practice: the position of the deceased in the grave. The men were always buried on their left side with their faces turned towards the east, the women on their right side with their faces turned towards the west. One hand (sometimes two) was folded under the head, and legs were stretched or tucked up. The laterite or rocky ground caused the dead to rest in the pits having no direct contact with the ground.

Children were treated differently. First, children did not have the right to be buried in the family grave, and even in the cemetery, children were buried in separate quarters. Their funeral took place without a ceremonial setting, as if insignificant, unless there was a declaration of the so-called “bad” death. When an infant dies at birth or shortly thereafter, there is an indifferent approach to its death. The parents do not bother to bring them home, but bury them near the delivery room.

An important change in funeral practices came with the widespread use of the coffin. Today, the coffin reaches the most distant places. However, about 30 years ago, when I was conducting research in northern Togo, older people argued that man was born naked, so he should return to the earth naked. At that time, the coffin appeared during funerals in the city, while in the villages it was an exception. One could see a significant difference in the use of coffins with neighboring Ghana. The parish of St. Martin in Bassar had a coffin, which was lent for church funeral ceremonies. The deceased lay in a coffin in the church and was carried to the cemetery in a coffin, after which the coffin was opened, the body was pulled out and put to the grave, taking care to cover it with boards or iron sheets, so that it would not come into direct contact with the ground.

The use of coffins significantly influenced the shape of graves. The grave became rectangular and the custom of bricklaying was accepted in the cities. In addition, the

custom of directing the face of the deceased to the east or west became outdated. A man or a woman lies in the coffin on his or her back, not on his or her side.

It is difficult to determine exactly when coffins appeared in Togo. They were certainly in use from the very beginning of colonization by Europeans. One of the informants claims that coffins in the 1940s became popular in Lomé. Accepting this date cautiously, it must be assumed that two forms of burial, in a coffin and without a coffin, existed side by side.

Today, the production of coffins is a lucrative occupation. The assortment you can meet at Lomé is wide, varying in quality, but also in price. They are not fancy coffins in the form of an animal or ship, as in southern Ghana, but more in line with European standards. The demand for coffins is also an important financial boon for carpenters in the north of the country. Making a coffin does not require much skill or a lot of effort, but the occupation itself is lucrative, especially because one can always raise the price, because no one dares to refuse the money for the dead. Sometimes coffins with windows are seen so that the funeral guests could see the deceased without opening the coffin.

It is debatable whether to open the coffin before the funeral or not. In Lomé, the presence of the body during the funeral vigil is possible. When the burial is organized in the place of origin of the person, when after the night journey the coffin with the deceased arrives, it is too risky to open it, as it had been exposed to various shakes due to the poor quality of the roads. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that, in the past, looking at the deceased was not something obligatory. The mourners could see the deceased in the hut before the body was ready for the funeral, wrapped in a mat and folded on a stretcher. The entombment took place behind a prepared curtain made of pieces of linen held by women.

The place of burial in the rural environment may be a problem for the inhabitants of Lomé. There is a story of a commercial trader who built a house in the village, burying his mother in the center, a house whose construction he began when the mother became seriously ill. He did not want to bury her in the Christian cemetery because she was faithful to the religion of her ancestors. He made efforts to use as many elements of the traditional funeral as possible. However, when he started throwing coins on the coffin, he became nervous when the women present at the funeral rushed to the grave to collect the money. He did not realize that according to the custom, the money given by his relatives was considered to be a reward for those who prepared a meal for the mourners (Pawlik 1990).

In the rural environment, a funeral vigil was adopted from the elements of the funeral practiced in Lomé. When the funeral is postponed and the body stored in the morgue, in the evening before the scheduled day of the funeral, a vigil is organized. There is a roofing, and borrowed chairs, invited drummers and small refreshments. If the family is Christian, a chanter and a guide will be invited to lead the prayers. Vigil is also a time waiting for the coffin with the deceased. Depending on the distance, it will take a few hours to get there because one cannot drive too fast. Transportation takes place under the cover of the night when it is colder. After arriving in the morning, the burial begins. After the burial, guests receive a meal.

Mourners, especially a widow or widower and children, will be subjected to the harassment of mourning. This will be explained below.

In the rural environment this is not the end of the ritual cycle. Months later, at an appointed time, the end of mourning ceremony will be organized. Even those who were buried in Lomé have the right to these ceremonies as the relatives living in the place of origin of the deceased insist on them.

Experiencing Mourning

The question of mourning is very complex. Tradition has much to say. A big problem for the residents of the city is to free themselves from the requirements of tradition and, at the same time, to maintain a sense of duty towards the deceased and the family. The length of the period of mourning depends on the family and the social environment to which the deceased belonged. Once this period lasted at least a year; today it is a personal problem. Some shorten it to a minimum; others try to fulfill the precepts of tradition.

Undoubtedly, some confusion regarding the length and the course of mourning is introduced by changes in the time of death. As Joël Noret points out, the shift of funeral time has an effect on the time of mourning, speeding up its ending, assuming that the consolation they feel obliged to give relatives and friends mourners has already been implemented, at least partially, before the funeral (Noret 2004a, p. 751). According to tradition, the widows' rituals were synchronized with funeral rituals. These practices began with the announcement of death, intensified until the moment of burial and immediately after it, and over time they slowly became more and more trimmed in form, putting the widow in the center for the last time during the rites ending the mourning. The time between the moment of death and the burial is extended due to the possibility of body preservation. Mourners, on the other hand, are subject to concern and social attention immediately after death, and not only after the funeral, as was the case when the widow or widower received condolences from the funeral participants. This discrepancy has considerable consequences on the psychological level of mourners. It delays the parting with the deceased for a few weeks and negatively affects the "work" of mourning.

In Lomé, the sight of widows, who wear dark or dark-colored clothes or have a shaved head, is not all that common. A similar practice is still found in traditional rituals linked to the end of the mourning period. The mourning experience encourages them to reduce their appearance to the public at least in its initial period. They also do not feel the need to show public mourning. Claude Rivière mentions wearing black shoes as a sign of mourning. The giving up of wearing jewelry has a similar significance (Rivière 1990, p. 195).

Many women are afraid when the family exerts pressure on them to submit to ritual practices of widowhood in accordance with tradition. It is worth stopping for a moment regarding this problem, which has been an issue of public debate for a

few years and the subject of activities of some organizations and associations. Social media draw a grim picture of the widows' rites. They emphasize the necessity to retreat during a long time without the opportunity to go to the toilet or change clothes, to shave one's head or to sit naked on the bare floor. All these practices were aimed at making the widow unattractive and repulsive, and at the same time served as a kind of therapy that would allow her to be separated from her husband. It should be noted that the procedure for a widower is much simpler.

The question arises: to what extend do descriptions in the social media correspond to reality? Claude Rivière sees a systematic shortening of the period of mourning depending on attachment to the deceased (1990, pp. 184–185). Relying on an informant from the Adjigo clan from the Aného area, he points to the complete isolation of women for at least 6 months. At the end of this long separation, the relatives of the deceased carry out a hearing to force the widow to take responsibility for her husband's death: "To achieve this goal, the deceased's sisters resort to any psychological and physical pressure that can be imagined to influence a widow: whipping, smoking chili pepper in the room (widow's cough would be a sign of guilt), obliging the widow to kneel on palm nut shells" (Rivière 1990, p. 198). It should be noted that this example shows an extreme case.

Recent press reports show that widowhood practices in this region of Togo have been officially abolished by traditional leaders as a result of the Alafia NGO, which since 2016 has been conducting awareness and formation campaigns among residents, especially women. In addition, it organizes meetings with traditional widows, to convince them of the harmfulness of similar practices. The decision of the responsible traditional leaders from Aného is not shared by everyone. The chairman of the confederation of traditional priests of Togo, Togbui Assiobo Gnayblodjro III, for example, is very conservative in this respect, claiming that women must submit to these rituals. Otherwise the spirit of the deceased husband will circulate over them. This belief, coming from the mouth of a traditional and very influential man, is shared by many women, especially in the rural areas, who sometimes give in to very intrusive practices without protest.

Although the traditional rituals seem repulsive to urban residents and in part they cannot be avoided, the more widespread fear and uncertainty of tomorrow is the social position of the widow as well as her fate after the death of her husband. In fact, most women are deprived of material resources because all the goods are taken over by the husband's family. This is not only about a possible inheritance in the form of capital or savings, but also about the basic means of living. The widow must fight to preserve the flat she shared with her husband because her husband's family exerts a strong pressure to expropriate her. In some families, the widow and orphans are treated well, but in other, more traditional ones, there are still problems with the inheritance rights for widows and orphans. State law protects orphans and widows as to their husband's inheritance, but often illiterate widows do not even know that one has to go to court when the husband's brothers drive her out of the land and take away her property. Among the organizations that help widows, it is worth mentioning the Fonds d'Aide aux Veuves et Orphelins (FONDAVO) and the Groupe de Réflexion et d'Action: Femme, Démocratie et Développement (GF2D) operating in

Togo. The first of them puts at the disposal of widows micro-credits and material help. GF2D conducts actions raising awareness in rural communities, combating violence based on gender differences and promoting women's rights.

According to tradition, after a period of mourning, the widow was inherited by one of the brothers or sons of the deceased husband, becoming his wife. Today, as this practice becomes less common, the widow must stand on her feet economically and remain single or marry again, but out of free choice. Members of the husband's family will do everything to deprive her of all means for living, considering themselves their legal brother's heirs. And even if they support the orphans, their brother's children, it often happens that they leave the widow on her own. This is especially striking when the spouses came from different ethnic groups.

Future of the Deceased

Death in the African tradition is seen as "an earthquake under the feet of a wanderer" (Makang Ma Mbong 1972), as a change in the status of a person, from a visible to invisible form. Funeral rites serve the efficient and effective passage of the ancestration process. Thus, they stretch over time and take the form of rites of transition that divide into a phase of separation, transition and acceptance. They harmoniously combine three levels: (1) the biological future of the deceased - from the dead body to the bones, (2) the future of invisible components of the death – their domestication and introduction into the world of ancestors, and (3) the work of mourning, especially regarding the widow, from separation of the deceased spouse to the final acceptance into the living community.

In this scheme of passage rituals, an important role is played by the ceremonies of ending mourning, bringing relief from fears, restoring the social order, as well as celebrating the deceased as an ancestor and tightening social ties. These ceremonies, along with ritual sequences, contain a strong dose of festivity, as evidenced by numerous participants: relatives, neighbors, friends and acquaintances, and by dances and songs and plenty of food. It is associated with huge expenses, in both the rural and urban environment.

In a meeting with Christianity, traditional rituals take on a different meaning, at least partially. Traditionally, the organization of big ceremonies was reserved for the head of a family, the one who died the so-called "good death", i.e. as an elderly person, after a short illness, surrounded by the presence of his children. Christianity introduced the equalization of the dead supplanting the phenomenon of death in a society that was heavily hierarchical, notes Michael Jindra. The status of ancestor, previously achieved mainly by titled people, was extended to a wider circle of people. The consequence of this is the spreading of the death celebration mainly as a cultural event (Jindra 2005, p. 357).

Among the rituals celebrated during traditional ceremonies ending the mourning period, especially incompatible with the Christian doctrine, is the search for the cause of death, considered in many ethnic groups of northern Togo as an indispens-

able condition for ancestration. It refers to a session of a divination consultancy, which is intended to indicate the one guilty of the death of a given person. It is a particularly spectacular part of the ceremony, which stretches for a period of several days. Nowadays, if it is celebrated at all, it ends with a verdict that indicates death as an indispensable turn in human life. Nevertheless, in the event of sudden or early death, it may have a very dramatic course with an indication of the guilty one. This practice, however, is strongly condemned by Christian churches due to the evocation of the spirit of the deceased.

Another doctrinal question opposed to the Christian and Muslim tradition is the issue of reincarnation. Resurrection of the bodies proclaimed by Christianity and Islam found favor with the followers of African traditional religions because, according to G.O. Kéyéwa, it was in line with existing beliefs in the mystical and affective experience of ancestors. Nevertheless, as the author emphasizes, these two concepts are opposed, because the Christian concept of life after death directs a man to hell or heaven, whereas for followers of African traditional religions, a man after death is in constant existence, which leads to the reinsertion of one of the essential components of the deceased individual (Kéyéwa 1997, p. 271).

In the traditional concept of a world of ancestors who rest in peace, leading a joyful life in symbiosis with descendants on earth and supporting the living, the dead remain not only alive, but seem to be indispensable for the survival of the group. The Christian concept causes this harmony to be disturbed by introducing a distinction between condemnation and election. For many Christians, it is unacceptable to recognize the unbaptized ancestors as damned. Christians emphasize the righteousness of their lives and the ties of blood with the faithful living, which provide them with a place among the chosen ones. A more radical approach is represented by neo-Pentecostal Christianity. Breaking down the traditional kinship structure, it emphasizes the spiritual relationship between the chosen ones. The living and the dead do not maintain any contact (Noret 2004b, p, 150).

Observation of changes in funeral practices allows us to see a systematic shift from the desire to communicate with the deceased (question about the cause of death, opening the mouth of an ancestor) to remembering the deceased as a family member. Consequently, accuracy in carrying out rituals no longer attracts attention, but rather a worthy honoring the deceased parent by organizing a celebration and proper reception of those arriving. The emphasis shifts from the effectiveness to the presentation of the deceased and his family in order to make a good impression. Printing commemorative materials with the image of the deceased, the musical setting, decorations and the sumptuous menu, take on special importance regardless of the costs incurred.

The Cost of Death

Finally, it is worth considering the costs of funeral rituals. They are so high that the deceased's family cannot handle them. In the case of death, there are different types of solidarity. The first of these is family solidarity. As emphasized by Awesso, the financial contribution of the family is real: "an instrument of measure of kinship and affinity and a true symbol of solidarity" (Awesso 2007, p. 263). The family of the deceased person counts on the help of relatives. On the other hand, the relatives, knowing that one day they will find themselves in a similar situation, count on the fact that helping today may grant similar signs of solidarity tomorrow.

Some families are well organized and regularly contribute money to the common cash register in the case of death. In this instance, it is easy for them to collect the necessary money to organize a funeral. When, however, there is no fund in common, expenses are imposed on the deceased's immediate family - on children in the first place, and then on siblings and cousins. In this case, relatives gather as soon as possible after death, assess expenses and divide them into equal parts (depending on the level of wealth of individual relatives). Each of them should provide an agreed sum as soon as possible so as not to delay the funeral. Some relatives react quickly; others shy away. In the latter case, the missing relatives must find the closest relatives so that the uncertain situation does not last.

An important role in completing the funeral budget is played by the so-called "big brothers" of the family. In the past, their role was fulfilled by family elders who were responsible for crucial decisions on the extended family level. Today, they are replaced by those who hold high offices in administration and politics, perform free professions or are excellent traders. These people are affluent and have influence. They not only give a significant financial contribution, but also decide when and how the ceremonies will be held. However, donations offered are often not enough to cover costs. Then the immediate family of the deceased person often borrows money or pays the funeral home by installments.

Apart from the family, there are other solidarity circles. One of them is ethnic solidarity. Representatives of the ethnic group in the city set up a kind of cash register, to which they regularly pay money in case of illness, accident or death of one of the members. We should also mention professional solidarity, when work colleagues help someone who lost a loved one or to help a family after the death of one of their members. The employer can also help. In the case of the employee's death, for example, he can pay for the coffin. One must not forget about neighborly solidarity, which consists in supporting the family in mourning by their immediate neighbors. This is a practical help including delivery of food products, preparation of a meal for guests, and reception for accommodation from distant relatives.

The display of funeral rituals is often criticized by the media and in conversations among people. It's not just about current practices; it was similar in the past. Although it was necessary to bury hastily and so was impossible to prepare the appropriate festive setting, the social burden of the funeral was transferred to the rites of ending mourning that took place a year or even two years after death. The

possibility of extending the period between death and funeral caused a tendency to shorten the time between the funeral and the ritual of ending the mourning.

However, attention is directed not only towards the deceased. Funeral rituals are an opportunity for many to show up. Monica Coralli puts it this way: "Real rivalry emerged among women: they bought *pagne* materials on credit, so they could wear them at the ceremony with the idea of showing their personal wealth, and in this way vanity dominated over the praise of character traits of a deceased person" (Coralli 2007, p. 274). In addition to the personal desire to show up, the concern of the family of the deceased is that the funeral ceremonies be remembered for a long time, and one remembers only those in which one was well taken care of.

There is noticeable competition among families in organizing the funerals of their relatives. Benu Afoevi Penoukou's note is very accurate: "In fact, every family wants to do more than another, so people get involved in expenses that are often extraordinary and beyond their abilities. In this way, some will spend their lives paying the debts for funeral rituals" (Penoukou 2003/2004 p. 22).

Paradoxically, there are situations in which a family without large financial resources and not having influential and rich relatives tries to imitate rich rituals. One of the respondents of Awasso comments: "Today, when organizing a funeral, everyone is doing everything to save face in front of people, to feel comfortable, so that they do not have to be ashamed or be ridiculed. Today, one can observe a kind of imitation. Even if you do not have the means, you have to do it like others" (Awasso 2007: 266).

The ritual situation posed by the death of a loved one creates a relationship of social coercion. Negligence of rituals will meet not only with disapproval, but also with ostracism. Modest rites will forever leave a stain on the honor of the family. Due to the large concentration of population in the city, there is basically no weekend in which funeral rites do not take place in a given district. Sometimes there are several of them, and the residents will have to make a choice about which they will attend. A large audience at night vigils will testify to the respect one had for the deceased, but also to the importance of the family. Due to the extremely demonstrative nature and ubiquity of funeral meetings, it will seem to the outside observer of life in Lomé that people devote all their time and focus on funerals. However, in the sensitivity inherited from the tradition, death means only a moment of life, a transition to a different form, and not a definitive end. Hence, giving the deceased due respect allows for the exclusion of harmful actions on his part, while showing compassion to the mourners will strengthen the sense of solidarity and unity among the living.

In fact, along with the memory of the deceased, the family is glorified. "With the popularization of mortals and the general practice of delaying burial, the dead body has become the prime medium on which to project an image of success and wealth" (de Witte 2011, p. 202). Preserving this image on photos and films made during the ceremony allows the family to show themselves as an oasis of generosity and prosperity, no matter what the cost. Focusing on the celebration pushes to the background problems related to death: long-term debt or difficult situations of widows and orphans. The situation of death, from which it is necessary to emerge victorious

at all costs, is an intense emotional and aesthetic experience that will feed a memory and serve as a model for imitation.

In conclusion, our analysis shows that it is not possible to oppose modernity and tradition. Modernity proposes practical solutions that are willingly adopted by traditional patterns. In fact, the ritual tradition is very flexible and easily adapts to new situations and circumstances. However, in the case of Togo, where one-third of the population declares belonging to African traditional religions, it plays an important role in cultural life. From the perspective of residents of the capital it can be perceived as a troublesome survival of the past, yet it is alive enough to leave a mark on society.

Changes in ritual ceremonies in Togo are carried out at all levels of analysis. At the level of social characters there is a professionalization where technicians replace ritual specialists. At the level of norms and institutions, the law (for example, the place of burial) has an increasingly greater influence, while traditional rules become more and more flexible and even forbidden, as in the case of widows' practices. The reference system is also changing: the influential ancestor becomes the one resting in the peace of the dead who live only in the memories of relatives. Funeral rituals celebrated because of religious needs become a cultural event.

References

Awesso, A. (2007). Les pratiques funéraires à Lomé. Quelles évolutions culturelles? In P. Gervais-Lambony & G. K. Nyassogbo (Eds.), *Lomé. Dynamiques d'une ville africaine* (pp. 251–270). Paris: Karthala.

Badohoun, K. Y. (2016). *Mortalité*. Lomé: INSEED. www.stat-togo.org/contenu/pedf/pb/pb-mortalite-rgph4-tg-2010.pdf. Access 14 May 2018.

Comhaire-Sylvain, S. (1982). *Femmes de Lomé*. Bandundu: CEEBA.

Coralli, M. (2007). Espaces publics et funéraires à Lomé et Cotonou. In P. Gervais-Lambony & G. K. Nyassogbo (Eds.), *Lomé. Dynamiques d'une ville africaine* (pp. 271–283). Paris: Karthala.

de Witte, M. (2011). Of corpses, clay, and photographs. Body imagery and changing technologies of remembrance in Asante funeral culture. In M. Jindra & J. Noret (Eds.), *Funerals in Africa. Explorations of a social phenomenon* (pp. 177–206). New York: Berghahn Books.

Frobenius, L. (1913). *Und Afrika Sprach, Vol. III. Unter den unsträflichen Aethiopen*. Berlin: Vita.

Gayibor, N. L., & alli. (2005). La vie quotidienne des togolais. In N. L. Gayibor (Ed.), *Histoire des togolais* (Vol. II.2, pp. 375–488). Lomé: Presses de l'UB.

Jindra, M. (2005). Christianity and the proliferation of ancestors: Changes in hierarchy and mortuary ritual in the Cameroon Grassfields. *Africa, 75*(3), 356–377.

Kéyéwa, G. O. (1997). *Vie, énergie spirituelle et moralité en pays Kabiyè (Togo)*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Makang Ma Mbong, M. (1972). Les funérailles africaines comme psychothérapie des deuils pathologiques. *Psychopathologie Africaine VIII*, (2), 201–215.

Müller, K. (1968). Histoire de l'église catholique au Togo. In *Lomé: Librairie Bon Pasteur*.

Noret, J. (2004a). Morgues et prise en change de la mort au Sud-Bénin. *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines XLIV (4), 176*, 745–767.

Noret, J. (2004b). De la conversion au basculement de la place des morts. Les défunts, la personne et la famille dans les milieux pentecôtistes du Sud-Bénin. *Politique Africaine, 93*, 143–155.

Noret, J. (2004c). Le pentecôtisme au Togo: éléments d'histoire et développement. *Autrepart, 31*, 75–92.

Pawlik, J. J. (1990). *Expérience sociale de la mort. Etude des rites funéraires des Bassar du Nord-Togo*. Fribourg: Editions Universitaires.

Penoukou, B. E. (2003/2004). *Les sources de l'espérance chrétienne face à la mort. Quels rites funéraires dans une Eglise-famille de Dieu au Sud du Togo? Perspectives missiologique*. Ottawa: Université Saint Paul (MA dissertation).

Piot, C. (1999). *Remotely global. Village modernity in West Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Recensement général de la population et de l'habitat (06 au 21 novembre 2010). Résultats définitifs, Lomé 2011, http://catalog.ihsn.org/index.php/catalog/4097. Access 30 July 2016.

Rivière, C. (1990). *Union et procréation en Afrique*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Spieth, J. (2009). *Les communautés ewe*. Lomé: Presses de l'UL.

Rituals Around Life and Death in Mexico; The Day of the Dead

Adelina Arredondo and Cristina Casillas

Abstract The Indigenous rituals commemorating the dead in Mexico have been reconstructed through generations and cultural syncretism. They can be traced from their pre-Columbian origins to present day festivities of *Día de Muertos* or Day of the Dead. This chapter aims to show the way that death is seen and commemorated for the Mexican cultures, the multiple origins of the festivities which are held today in Mexico and how they have survived, blended and overlapped. It explains that some particular approaches to the ways the celebrations and rituals for the dead have to be considered in order to understand the diversity that generated what people live in Mexico nowadays. Our work highlights the cultural importance of these rituals and the multiple effects that began as the cultural syncretism process with the European culture, especially the religious aspects started. We discuss the way these festivities have been institutionalized by the cultural official policies and the marketing consequences of such homogenization. Finally we show its cultural and pedagogical value and some advantages of spreading to the world of this UNESCO-appointed Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Our chapter explores the ways Mexicans commemorate death and dead people and the indigenous origins of one of the Mexican dearest celebrations, bringing unique opportunities to learn and approach a nonwestern and rather admirable way of living everyday life and death.

Keywords Death commemoration · Day of the dead · México · Indigenous culture · Pedagogy of death

When confronted with death, Mexicans have unique ways of feeling about, thinking of, symbolizing and celebrating it. The following is a brief account of how the Mesoamerican indigenous roots about visions of death can be traced to the understanding of death rituals and celebrations in present day Mexico, as seen through the experiences and perspectives of the authors.

A. Arredondo (✉) · C. Casillas
Instituto de Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos, Cuernavaca, Mexico
e-mail: adelinaarredondo@yahoo.com

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_14

Mexico is one of the most diverse countries in the world with almost all the climates, from rainforests to deserts, from coniferous forests to tropical beaches. This diversity made possible the development of more than 200 different cultures and complex civilizations as advanced as the Olmecs, Toltecs, Mayas and Aztecs, started ten centuries ago. Many of the cultural roots can still be traced in today's ways of living in Mexico, blended and overlapped with the Catholic European culture that the Spaniards brought. During the colonial years, these processes originated a complex syncretism and a cultural diversity. Mexico's diversity is manifested by holding position seven in UNESCO's World Heritage list including cultural, natural and mixed sites, and it has also inscribed nine cultural practices in UNESCO's Intangible Heritage list, including traditional Mexican cuisine and the indigenous festivity dedicated to the Dead.

Why Are We Writing About This Topic? A Starting Point

I, Adelina, spent my early childhood immersed in the northern Mexican culture within a conservative yet enlightened Catholic family. I inherited a mixed past with strong Spanish and some indigenous values fused with the white-pure ascetic modernity of hospitals. My contact with death was truly distant. Grownups would not talk to children about dying people; they would not speak of death or about a seriously ill person. Children were not allowed to attend funerals. The death of a beloved relative was hidden from them for a long time. I was already ten when my toddler brother died, and even then my parents would not tell us until several days after. It was my tiresome questioning about Betito's health and my asking when he would be back from the hospital that made my mother explain to us that he had gone to heaven. Just like that, without previous rationalizing about death and beyond Catholic teachings on hell, purgatory and heaven, I finally understood that death meant inexistence, the non-presence, the permanent absence. I understood that it had nothing to do with heaven or hell; it was so much darker, unknown, violent and terrifying. I cried without consolation for the brutal loss, and my mother cried with me.

Children were not allowed to attend funerals in northern society; they were raised in "secret gardens" where death did not reach. For a child the weak relation with death was through old photograph family albums with images of your great-grand mother and uncle. Death was still very distant, though we would sing and dance to rhymes regarding the passing away of the beloved sick doll. "I've got a doll dressed in blue; she wears white shoes, a dress with tulle apron. I took her for a walk to the main square and she got the flu. When we came back home she died". Regarding the death of a soldier: "Mambru has died and they are taking him to his burial. On top of his tomb there's a birdie" (*Tengo una muñeca vestida de azul, con zapatos blanco, delantal de tul. La llevé a la plaza y se me constipó. Llegando a la casa la niña murió. Mambrú ya se ha muerto y lo llevan a enterrar… Y encima de la tumba un pajarito está*.

Urban children in the north did not know what a tomb looked like; they were not frequent visitors to cemeteries. Then I was taken to live in central Mexico where, during the autumn I merely saw lots of *cempasúchitl*. [*Cempasúchitl*, from the náhuatl language *cempoalxóchitl* meaning many flowers, is a flower that was widely used for ceremonial purposes in Mesoamerican prehispanic rituals and it can be seen in many Aztec sculptures. It is a flower native to Mexico. Despite its American origin it is commonly known as African marigold.] There were also other goods like *pan de muerto* (bread of the dead), sugar skulls, beautifully perforated colored paper, lots of pottery, and all sizes of candles in the local markets. So imagine the challenge I was presented with, when after graduating from college and back in the northern city of Chihuahua, as a sociologist and university professor from Southern Mexico, I was trusted with dictating lectures to teachers and the writing of a booklet for the Secretary of Education about the meaning of the Day of the Dead altars, which were imposed at that time as mandatory in schools. I was pressed with the argument that in those latitudes and times nobody else would write about the topic. I used all the available resources to conduct a thorough research in all the libraries within my reach, and organized a booklet on the celebration of the Day of the Dead.

Four decades ago, these celebrations were limited to the popular sectors of the center and south of Mexico, which held strong indigenous roots. But Mexican society has undergone many changes since the 1980s; today's idea of celebrating the Day of the Dead is a festivity in the whole country which includes a parade in Mexico City with humongous *papier mache catrinas* and other skeleton figures.

What is the cultural importance of these rituals? How have they been constructed, reformed, reshaped and woven into the interstices of what has become modern Mexican culture? What elements of the ancient indigenous and pre-Columbian groups still survive today? What elements show the syncretism of the Indigenous People with the Hispanic-brought religion, food and traditions?

In the following pages we will provide a brief description of the Day of the Dead (*Día de Muertos*) celebrations, other death rituals, and how people get ready for them. We will show where these interrogations may come from and their key importance to understanding the multiple paths followed to create today's festivities, and we will point at other indigenous ways of burying the dead. Finally, we will conclude with the importance of the representation and diversity of practices in the Day of the Dead celebrations.

How Is the Day of the Dead Celebrated Today?

There are multiple commemorations of life and death in the extended diversity of the Mexican territory. Social constructions throughout time and spaces, rituals for Day of the Dead show cultural characteristics that overlap and mix in the different syncretic representations that we can witness in present day homes, cemeteries, churches and plazas. At the end of October and the beginning of November in the central and southern states of Mexico people prepare a variety of rituals and

offerings for those relatives that have passed away. We will consider some particular examples that will help us understand them.

In Ocotepec, Morelos, people spend weeks preparing the offering for a person that passed away in the previous year. These new offerings are arranged in a costly fashion with all the local products such as expensive handmade and beautifully decorated candles, which look like wax lacing and the preferred dishes and beverages of the honored one. Old offerings are set in different houses, and all of them are open to family and friends who come to pay homage to the still living relatives. Most people arrive with candles to light in memory of the departed one; they also bring bread, coffee or sugar to help the family with the expenses, since the visitors are offered sweets, meals and drinks upon their arrival. Some families receive hundreds of guests in one night and they cook and serve everybody at big tables. Most of them are poor and will pay for the contracted debts for that occasion over several years. However some families also take monetary contributions that are discretely placed in a pot.

To honor the dead, *Miquixtli* or Death Festival, takes place for several days in Cuernavaca, the capital city of the state of Morelos. There is a wide variety of cultural activities, from traditional offerings to workshops, and from art craft creation and markets to theater presentations. Delicious traditional dishes are prepared, popular and classical music concerts are presented, and colorful parades along the streets and movie projections take place. In some villages, the walk of *el Campanero* or the Bell Ringer is organized. Some people carry a cardboard skeleton as they walk with the bell ringer, and others get dressed as crying widows or other bearded characters who accompany the bearers and the bell ringers go from door to door asking for donations that will be deposited in the family altars. In Mixquic, close to Mexico City, groups of children become the bell ringers, who also perform the duty of letting people know the different times for the celebrations (Gutiérrez 2013). In this culturally mixed country, the indigenous mythology and European- brought pagan beliefs blended with religious rituals can be seen in some communities such as Calderón de Cuautla, Morelos, where the local church tolls mournful bells to accompany the dedication of the offering to the dead. This is a solemn and silent ritual that is observed with respect on October 31st and November 1st. Church bells are tolled all through the night in Malinalco, State of Mexico, which was also an important pre-Hispanic settlement.

Literary *calaveritas* or little skull writing contests take place in many towns of Mexico. Their purpose is to honor or otherwise mock with a poem some important family members, friends or even public characters such as actresses or politicians, pretending they passed away. Many of these are also accompanied with paintings and cartoons, which are displayed while people read aloud the *calaveritas*, and are a regular part of the entire festivity (El Portal de México 2015).

On November 2nd, in the cemetery of the island of Janitzio, large families and visitors gather to light candles, bring flowers and food for their ancestors while they talk, pray and sing all day and night accompanying each other in the ceremonies known as *La Llorada* or The Crying and *La Lumbrada* (Portal Turístico 2015) or The Lightening. All the island seems to light up, framed by the dark waters of

Pátzcuaro Lake in Michoacán. On the other hand, just as every community has its own way of paying tribute to its dead, some elements are common to most offerings and can be obtained in local markets or improvised street sale stalls. These improvised markets, which overflow the sidewalks close to cemeteries and churches and fill the neighborhoods with colors, sounds and smells that are unique to the season.

During the last weeks of October families who will arrange an offering at home, start gathering objects to decorate and materials they need to construct an altar for their passed away loved ones, sometimes on the floor, sometimes on a table or in levels in which the items will be displayed. They clean and reorganize the area or room, and they draw out money the family has been saving for the occasion, many times for the entire year, to buy the goods they will need, as everything has to be new. For the description of the popular celebration of the Day of Death in many homes, we are following our own observations and our works (Arredondo 1987, 1917), collating and extending them with the description that the National Council for Culture and Arts (Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes) offers in its publication like *Calaveritas* (Conaculta 2018).

If you observe any Day of the Dead offering you will appreciate traditional elements representing the heavens, on top of the table cloths, and centrally located in the altar you will see the photograph or photographs for whom the offering is set. Colored tissue paper which was cut by members of the family or more commonly bought for the occasion, display all sorts of cartoons with *catrinas*, skeletons and other beautiful designs related to the celebration. Candles are strategically placed to lighten the path to traditional dishes like *mole* and *tamales*, or other favorite foods of the missing person and *pan de muerto* (bread of the dead) with little bone like figures atop in sweet and salty flavors. Beverages that were preferred by the honored lost one such as *pulque* (fermented maguey-sap alcoholic drink), tequila or beer, but also plain water and salt are placed in new clay pots, baskets and plates specially bought. Seasonal fruits, traditional sweets made with amaranth, pumpkin seed and hardened sugar skulls decorated with colorful flowers and names add to the visual effects of the large quantity of orange, yellow or magenta flowers of *cempasúchitl.* These are used to build the trail a soul should follow from the gate to their portrait in the middle of the warmth of candles, food, and burning *copal* incense. Some crosses are also displayed either made of wood, ashes or *cempasúchitl* flower petals. For the indigenous it represents the opening between dimensions, so the souls of the dead may come to our world and share with the family these festivities. However in this syncretic society, the crosses also mean Christianity and the hope of reaching the good afterlife promised. Finally, decorations like clay or wooden skeletons, *alebrijes* or zoomorphic fantastic creatures, images of saints or the virgin, crucifixes, or even cardboard coffins are included along with favorite objects of the dead such as a *sombrero*, shawl, toy, musical instrument or even cigarettes.

Not all the altars are displayed the same day, since dead people are honored on different dates regarding some special conditions and customs in the respective family and community. On October 28th, the altars of those who suffered a violent or sudden death are set. October 31st and November 1st are the days when *los muertos chiquitos* or the little dead come. The altars are decorated with white flowers,

favorite character pictures, mostly toys and candy, since those who died as children are remembered on these days and their souls will come back to play. On November 2nd all the other dead adults will be remembered. The altars present all their magnificence, the smell of flowers, sugar cane, oranges and squash are mixed with the incense, cinnamon, coffee, chocolate, *pulque* or *atole* (sweetened corn non-alcoholic beverage). The warmth of the candle lights and the orange yellow flowers provide an inviting environment for the most important visitor that night: the dead, who will come back once again to enjoy food and company with their family.

Since pre-Columbian time, *chilacayotes* or pumpkins are carved to use as lanterns at the doors of the houses and for lining the path of flower petals into the house. It becomes socially important to comply with the traditions of displaying altars since neighboring offerings would be depleted too soon of their provisions if people would not participate. Neglecting to place an appropriate offering could then result in family feuds and neighbor enmities (Arredondo et al. 1987). The following day all the food, drinks and sweets are given away to be enjoyed by the relatives, friends and visitors; however a part of them, like the hardened sugar skulls, are kept to give to the children who will dress up in costumes and sing popular rhymes asking for their *calaverita* or treat.

What Other Mexican Popular Customs Are Related to Death?

In Mexico there are many other ceremonies relating to death as part of the ritual of accompanying a soul. Funerals take place in numerous ways depending on the region, the socio-economic level of the family and their traditions, if the community has strong indigenous roots or if the relatives are influenced by modern urban trends. Thus a person's burial may take 9 days of music, masses, processions and people gathering to help prepare special food to accompany the mourners in their long good-bye or may be austere and sanitized as if wanting to finish the solemn procedure off quickly. When we were present, we witnessed how the family would spend all their savings in feeding the visitors who accompanied them during the nine days of rituals. On the floor, in the place where the coffin was during the first day before being buried, they would place a big cross of wood, and on top they would lay white flowers and a red one in the middle, symbolizing the deceased's heart. Every day, they would set a fresh layer of flowers with a ceremony of prayers and songs. Visitors would sit around the room that had been decorated simulating the sky, with a blue cloth and stars, as the family would offer them hot meals and drinks. Depending on the importance in the community of the person who passed away, visitors arrived from a few to hundreds every day, some of them with some food for the funeral. On the eighth day, people would stay all night and day, praying and singing while family members offer hot drinks and bread. On the ninth day, the family would offer visitors mole, Mexican style rice, tortillas, atole and bread. They set a table at the top of the cross with the best meals, like a whole cooked chicken, a basket of fruits and drinks, for the passed away to eat. They believe the spirit would

take the essence of the meals. Then, they pick up every layer of the flowers, put them gently in baskets and then go in a procession to the cemetery and set the cross of flowers in the same layout on the top of the tomb. Finally they would light candles. It is possible to imagine how expensive is a burial for these people and, sometimes, if there had been previous expenses in health care, they would have huge debts.

In some regions of Mexico where the strong indigenous roots still have their hold, people will provide the deceased with several objects that will serve in the difficult path to the afterlife. Water and food will be needed for the journey, clothes and shoes, candles and a stick to help light and clear the way. Community members will also pray, burn *copal* incense and offer wreaths of flowers to help guide the soul so that it does not stay behind transformed into a bad *nahual* or animal- shaped grieving soul that will cause damage to ones that were once beloved (García 2013).

Yet another ritual for the dead takes place in the central town of Celaya, the 'Walk of Luminaries'. That is organized to commemorate the opening of the first civil graveyard of the city in which the human remains were transferred from the religious cemetery. Neighbors burn fires all night in order to guide the souls back to their final resting destination; that tradition is in fact of indigenous *Otomi* origin (AM news 2018). Probably the most widespread and visible way of helping and remembering the dead is placing a cross in the place where a person was killed in an accident or murdered. These are quite common in the highways and roads of Mexico. Families do that to help the soul of the person continue to the afterlife and avoid having the dead wandering about and doing mischief. For most indigenous groups in Mexico it is common to place a cross made of ashes, powdered limestone or flowers in the spot where a person has passed away as well as in the place where the family will mourn for their loss (UNAM 2018).

Why the Day of the Dead Became an Institution?

Mexicans follow different rituals to commemorate the life and death of dear family members or even public figures. These traditions help people achieve the double purpose of disposing of the mortal remains in the most honorable and thoughtful way and aiding them in the healing process of accepting the loss of a beloved one. In private, families work to produce the best possible offerings for the returning soul as a way of showing their trust in the continuing existence of the spirit and the hope that it will come back to rejoice with them again as long as the altar is set in his or her memory.

The altar is open to the public, so the entire community brings the ritual alive as it is understood, followed and respected by locals and foreigners, as well. Death is accepted and life is valued in a secular celebration with a strong nationalistic identity and even pushed as a tourist attraction. Death is not hidden or dreaded; death is understood as indivisible from life, thus, worth celebrating as part of the culture transmitted through generations. Communities, especially indigenous ones, preserve

the rituals of life and death in the belief that they come from our past to create our present and they need to continue in order to construct the future. The Day of the Dead festivity has even been institutionalized through education in public and private schools, bringing generations closer together, opening a space and time for people to reflect on death starting in early childhood, providing a way to recognize the cycle of life and creating identity within the community. In universities the students build huge and very artistic altars, and they celebrate conquests. But how was this achieved and for what purposes?

Rituals commemorating the Day of the Dead were widespread in the central and southern regions of Mexico. They were not practiced in all the country, especially not in the Northern region. Federal authorities in the field of Culture were worried that people, especially in the North border, were becoming closer to Halloween, which was considered a foreign celebration transmitted through the commercial and economic border activities. So by the last decades of the twentieth century, people would go to the malls to get Halloween treats, decorations and costumes; children would dress up and go trick-or-treating just as in many American neighborhoods. Considering that this festivity lacked meaning and seeing it as a foreign cultural invasion, the Mexican Secretary of Education designed in the early 1980s an intervention strategy in order to spread the Day of the Dead practices as lived in central Mexico, all over the country. But having a secular education system since 1861 (Arredondo and González 2014), Catholic celebrations of All Saints could not be included in the school calendar. Therefore, the inclusion of mandatory educational activities were seen as pedagogical practices that would strengthen the nationalistic spirit after the Mexican Revolution and enrich the educations of the students (Sol de Parral 2013).

In order to promote national culture and reinforce the preservation of Mexican heritage, elementary schools developed educational activities related to the Day of the Dead celebrations (Ollivier 2011). Then, the celebration of *Día de Muertos* was included in the official curriculum, programs, and textbooks, as well as in all teacher training programs (SEP 2015). However, enforcing these educational policies was quite complex, since they actually opposed the previous integrationist policies. These aimed to culturally and linguistically amalgamate the different indigenous groups that existed in the country at the time and to bring them into the western world train of thought through the basic education system. As a result, public education in indigenous communities had a strong base of western Hispanic contents within a curriculum taught in Spanish, the official and homogenizing language (Loyo 2002).

Although this imposition by the Secretary of Education was negatively received and strongly opposed by some radical liberals and cultural sectors, it quickly gained acceptance in different societal spheres and was perceived as part of the alleged Mexican essence. The institutional support that the National Union of Educational Workers of Mexico (SNTE) gave to these policies also helped to get wide spread approval. Day of the Dead altars were presented in basic schools, high schools, universities, government offices, museums and public parks, and they were gradually seen as displays of popular traditions rather than governmental impositions.

However, this institutionalization that flows from the government to basic education levels seems to homogenize and normalize the ancient death rituals, denying its profound meaning and regional diversity. Mandatory Day of the Death altars were implemented to counteract Halloween activities but the result was different from what was expected. Children do create their altars following the Secretary of Education guidelines and then, whether the same day or another, they have a Halloween parade and party at the school and outside it. These contradictions add to the strong Catholicism lived by most Mexican families who will help spread the powerful hold of the Catholic Church by attending to the specific liturgy and observing the days to finally go home and be present for the coming of their relatives' souls.

On the other hand, the celebration has been accepted and promoted by the ruling elite as part of the abstract patrimony that informs the national identity, and it has been used by political sectors to demand the government have a stronger representation in the national state (Lomnitz 2013, p. 432). Neither of these spheres of action construct the deep meaning that the popular classes confer on the Day of the Dead. Each family follows community guidelines and they include their own particular traditions so that the survival of the memory of those who have died is guaranteed among their relatives (Caruso 1981), giving a person's own fear of physical death a soothing effect. It is this stronghold of meaning recreating the various celebrations and rituals of death in our country that has transcended the national boundaries, so that since 2008 'The Indigenous Festivity dedicated to the Dead' has been included by UNESCO in the list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO 2015).

What Were the Rituals Around the Dead in Original Indigenous Cultures?

For ancient Mesoamericans, rituals honoring the gods and commemorating life and death were a central part of their cosmic vision and were present in their everyday activities.

In Mexico today a large diversity of ethnic groups converge, exchange and reconform their culture and their customs influenced on a smaller or larger scale by the State-imposed hegemony. But the multiplicity of cultures was even bigger before the Europeans set foot in the continent. Just a few of these groups left their ideas in writing, historical records, mathematics, astronomical advances, education and government systems. So ceremonies such as those of the ball games, human sacrifices or even the account of rituals honoring the dead are undocumented.

For example, for the ancient Maya who flourished in southeastern Mexico and Central America from c. 2000 BCE to the 1400s CE, death was a normal part of a person's life and it was acknowledged as part of the infinite cycle of time and space. When a person died their *Pixan* (Buenfil et al. 2018) or divine life fluid went back to the sacred source which was represented by the branches and roots of the sacred ceiba tree. The Maya believed in the flowing connections that existed among the

living, the dead and the gods. The *Pixan* would travel to the corresponding afterworld level. A warrior who died in battle, a woman who died in childbirth, a high priest or a person who was sacrificed to the gods all went to the highest heaven. But the passage back to the origin was neither safe nor easy since they had to face the *Okol Pixan* or soul robbers; this is the reason why several rituals were performed to accompany the dying as well as the dead. Family members would consider that a dead person would need nourishment during the long journey to the underworld, so some fresh corn tortilla dough was placed in his or her mouth (De Landa 2018). The dead were buried with their most important belongings according to their rank and social status; a woman would be buried along with her weaving and cooking tools or a warrior with his weapons. Relatives would place an offering including water, salt, burning copal incense, lighted wax candles, cacao beans, corn, seeds, feathers, flowers, fruits and even precious stones so that the soul would have a happy encounter back with Mother Earth. In the Maya cosmogony, the cross symbol was used in several ways. A cross was placed to represent the sacred *ceiba* tree that signified the eternal flow of life and death, crosses of wood were placed to represent the fire that would be burnt to light the soul through its passage, and representations of crosses of bones painted in vases or carved in stones were offerings to the gods of death. (Ballestas 2015). Funerary rites contributed to social structure and reproduce power relations (Carrasco, 1999).

Another example comes from the civilization that used the rituals of death as an excuse to exercise its power to subjugate entire city-states. The Aztec (1325–1521 CE), long before Europeans arrived to the Americas, had already been successful in homogenizing the diversity of cultures which they conquered using the cult of death as a justification for the human sacrifices and offerings of blood and corpses to the ever thirsty gods. The *Mexicas* or People of the Sun, also known as the Aztecs, managed to occupy an empire that covered most of central Mexico. The *Mexica* military-priestly class used the prevailing indigenous mythology to legitimate their power over the conquered peoples and to reproduce the social order. The machinery worked to get tribute from the communities that could consist of food, tools, instruments, and other highly appreciated goods such as quetzal feathers or elaborate obsidian crafts. Other people would serve as slaves or have the high honor of being sacrificed to the Sun. Another imposition was the 'flower wars' which were fought following a set of conventions against the enemies of the Aztecs in order to procure blood and human sacrifices to the gods, so they would spare them from droughts and famines. In these ways we can understand how the high priests-military leaders would give back to the people the abundance of resources to generate and continue life, paid by them with blood and death. The life cycles of the universe that would keep the cosmic order (Matos 1975, p. 43–47) were secure as long as the divine were worshiped with human sacrifices and an abundance of hearts and blood. Human sacrifice was not about individual salvation but about preservation of the world and ensuring cosmic health (Paz 1982, 22). For the Aztecs, symbols of death were present in everyday life, in their songs and poems, games, celebrations, clothing, daily used utensils, calendar days and in their architecture. A permanent altar was constructed next to the most important temples. This was a *tzompantli* or

wall of human skulls which were impaled in rows in order to honor those who had been sacrificed and which was standing on a wooden or stone platform. The Spaniard Andrés Tapia counted about 136,000 skulls in one *tzompantli* (Matos 1975, 108; Kickerberg 1985, 155) and the Franciscan friar Motolinia wrote about a wall with over 500 skulls (Motolinía 1971, 74; Dehouve 2010).

For Mesoamerican cosmogonies time and life were understood as cycles of construction, destruction and rebirth of the universe. The Aztecs considered they were living in the fifth cycle or Fifth Sun, which was created by the gods from the remains of the Fourth Sun or cycle. *Quetzalcóatl* or feathered-serpent god used his own blood to create men out of the bones of ancestors who had lived in previous Suns or cycles and that were stolen from the *Mictlán* or the dwelling of the dead. Quetzalcóatl provided men with corn and agricultural products (Motolinía 1971, p.194; León Portilla 1977, p. 19–22; González 1979, p.149; Kickeberg 1994, p. 21–32). However men would keep the sun's perpetual movement providing hearts and blood from human sacrifices to secure the cycles of life and death (Motolinía 1971, p. 50–54; Matos 1975, p. 9; Caso 1987).

For the Aztecs just as for the Maya, the essence of life would continue existing in a place defined by the way of dying not the actions in life (Matos 2013, p.18). Those who died in any way considered related to water such as drowning, being struck by lightning or certain diseases would go to the *Tlalocan,* paradise of the god of water *Tláloc*. Others would go to the dark lord's neutral dwelling, the *Mictlán*. Those warriors killed in battle, people who had been sacrificed to the gods or women who died in childbirth had the highest honor to dwell along with the sun god *Tonatiuh* (Sahagún 1971, p. 71; Matos 1975, p.58–59). But the journey was not easy, according to Friar Bernardino de Sahagún who collected testimonies describing the seven dangerous places to cross before reaching the *Mictlán*. The dead would try to overcome these hazards using the water, food, beverages, flowers, herbs, clothing, tools, weapons, semiprecious stones and even a sacrificed dog, all of which were placed along with them in their last resting place (Sahagún, 2012, p.227; Matos 1975, p.75).

These beliefs are still alive today in most indigenous communities where altars for the dead are placed with numerous offerings to guide the souls back following a path lined with *cempasúchitl* flowers or signalled with crosses made of wood, which in the highlands of Chiapas symbolize the doors between the worlds of the living and the dead, the inter-dimensional transition (Pozas 1952). The dead are welcomed back since they are a necessary part of the cycle of life. For the Rarámuris in northern Mexico, the dead would clean underground rivers so the water could flow into the sea (López 2002, p. 32–33; Piñón 1987, p. 22–26; Bennet and Zingg, 1978). The people settled in both coasts of the Gulf of Baja California had similar and other contrasting customs (Porcayo and Rojas, 2018, Rosales and Sánchez, 2018; Villalpando and Watson, 2018; García and Watson, 2018; Valenzuela and Santos, 2018); For the indigenous in Guerrero, the dead, especially children, would bring rain clouds to their villages to make their crops grow and ensure good harvests (Barbosa 2010, p. 27).

Evidently these rituals of death were not just passed through generations from the Aztec rites across the empire to present day Mexico. There was a second cultural syncretism that started as the Europeans arrived, for it was the mighty Aztec Empire the Spaniards found in the continent, the ones they fought and conquered producing this new syncretism.

What Happened When the Two Worlds Met?

The Conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards was a series of wars and alliances with groups they found from the coasts of present day Veracruz to the central plateau of Mexico, many of which had been subjugated by the Aztec, their victims of exploitation and war (Díaz 1979, Vol. I, p. 141, 262, 294, 314, Vol. II p. 36, 74). The new arrivals to the continent were themselves a synthesis of many cultures. The Spaniards were a mesh of diverse people from the Celts and Iberians to the Basques and Catalans, with influences from Phoenicia, Greece and Carthage. They had been invaded by Alani, Swabians and Visigoths and had been under seven centuries of Roman domination and almost eight centuries of Islamic occupation (Carrasco et al. 2001; Vilar 1980). These last two brought the rather solemn views of death from the Muslims and the Christians, which mixed with the once pagan Spanish population (Elton 1984, p.347). So the waves of illiterate soldiers, sailors, adventurers and merchants brought their superstitions, beliefs and rites along with the strict rituals of the Catholic friars and priests (Lafaye 1978, p.144). These mixed mainly with the dominant *Mexica* culture resulting in an even more intricate tapestry which became the complex syncretism of the two worlds: Christian European (Hispanic) religion and traditions with the ancient Mesoamerican beliefs.

For the Spaniards, death was the continuation of the actions and deeds performed during one's lifetime; the body would die but the soul would continue its existence. If it was possible, dying people would be accompanied during their agony by a priest who would administer assistance for a good Catholic death. When the person succumbed a candle was lit and placed on one hand and a crucifix on the other. Candles were also lit on the four corners of the bed and church bells would toll. Food and drinks were prepared for the attendants to the funerals; sacred music and songs would accompany the ritual.

The Spaniards had a festivity to worship the dead: All Souls Day, a celebration that started long before but was confirmed in the ninth century by Pope Gregory IV. A day before, on November 1st, people would celebrate the Feast of All Saints including the Holy Child. These two festivities blended with the rituals honoring the dead by the Mesoamerican Indigenous peoples (Lomnitz 2013, p.111). Christian and pagan rites once again mixed and the missionaries and priests would end with the ancient customs such as placing bones or belongings of the deceased in the family altars (Lomnitz 2013, p.111–116). In order to teach the new religion and convert the population to Catholicism, missionaries and priests used images of death as

frightful and final, a skeleton wielding a scythe, or members of high society in a macabre dance as they are taken to the grave (*Arqueología Mexicana* 2013, p.72).

To persuade the natives to convert to Catholicism, paintings and sculptures were placed in altars and walls of churches, convents and monasteries. These representations would show the pains, tortures and horrors the dead had to endure in purgatory and hell. Saints were depicted bestowing their virtues on others and following a life of restriction, penance and generosity that was indispensable for salvation. The Inquisition brought by the Europeans would bring torture and death to the streets and public plazas. It was not to ensure the cosmic order, it was to pay for sins and to have a chance to be saved; it was a different form of controlling masses through fear (Arredondo 1987, 16).

During the Colony, rituals related to death and burial practices had to follow the Christian faith regulations. Indigenous and mestizo people had to stop cremating the bodies and to bury them in churches or holy fields; ceremonies were also forbidden as any use of the bodies was considered magic or witchery (González 1910, p. 675; Rodríguez 2009*, p.*113–119). However the Spanish also brought the carnival and burlesque style depiction of death, the one that people would mock in the Macabre Dances of public parades before Easter, remains of Greek and Roman heritage (Sabatier, 1970).

So in the New Spain the *Día de Muertos* festivity became popular precisely in the synthesis of the diversity of practices that continued sometimes with changed meanings. Setting home altars and offerings for the souls as the development of a specialized cuisine occurred; many treats were prepared for the occasion. Elaborate dishes with the rich mix of the continents' ingredients brought Bread of the Dead, which was decorated with bone figures and sugar or sesame. Hard sweets imitated the relics of Christian saints called 'weaklings', and children shaped bread covered in pink sugar. Many of these recipes were of medieval Arabic origin brought from León, Aragón, Castile and Catalonia where they are still prepared today and known as *panallets,* fine sweets covered with almonds or pine nuts (*Arqueología Mexicana* 2013, p.75). Elaborate cuisine and baroque designs were distinctive of the Colonial era as the celebration of the Day of the Dead spread strong roots in the popular culture which would not be eradicated even with the illustrated Bourbon Reforms of the seventeen century (Lomnitz 2013*, p.*252).

The Day of the Dead spread from indigenous communities and the privacy of homes to public spaces such as cemeteries, streets, churches and plazas. As a result of cultural syncretism, the resistance to the dominant culture and the struggle to create a national identity, public displays of popular culture were encouraged in the nineteenth century. The literary creation of *calaveritas* or popular verses concerning death or the drawings and engravings created by José Guadalupe Posada making his *catrina*s famous reflected the synthesis of the Mexican idiosyncrasies around the ideas of death (Gallegos 2015). Young people would dress up in different costumes representing different aspects of death; they would parade around public spaces carrying cardboard coffins or corpses asking for treats (Fig. 1). Close to the date, markets would overflow with goods and products needed for the altars such as flowers,

Fig. 1 Young people representing different aspects of death

Fig. 2 "Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central" of Diego Rivera, Museo Mural Diego Rivera, from http://personajeshistoricos.com/c-pintores/diego-rivera/, https://hablacultura.com/turismo-idiomatico/costumbres/dia-de-muertos-en-mexico/

candles, copal incense, mole, bread of the dead, skulls, skeletons and bones made of candy, wood or cardboard.

After the Mexican Revolution in the early twentieth century, the State promoted symbols to unify the nation and create a strong national identity. In Diego Rivera's mural (Fig. 2) "Dream of a Sunday afternoon in the Alameda Park" completed in 1947, he portrayed the uses and customs of modern Mexico with its colorful pallet

of social strata and famous characters; where the central part is taken by Mexican death, the fashionable *Catrina*, is taken from Posada's engravings. In Mexican literature, death is a central topic and it is driven away from the traditional typologies as writers maintain a constant dialogue with death itself (Villarreal 2013, p. 258). Thus the vision of death as 'a peculiarly Mexican symbol' (Lomnitz 2013, p. 402) emerged from the work of post-revolutionary artists and intellectuals whose higher goal was to reconstruct the Mexican nation.

Mexicans Dual Relations with Death: Considerations

It has been sometime since I stopped dancing to children's rhymes about a deadly-sick doll or the casualty-of-war soldier, but the prevalence of death as a central theme in popular songs and poems is still present today. Almost all over the country, the ceremonies to commemorate the dead are reproduced as they were constructed, woven again into the intricate fabric that Day of the Dead festivities are today. We, the authors of these lines, did not live the custom of celebrating the Day of Dead in our childhood; we have incorporated that celebration in our own family customs, and we respect and love it. It has enriched our lives giving us a sense of belonging not only to a native culture, but also to a chain of generations in our own families.

We have addressed some elements that have knitted this mesh: the cosmogony of the Mesoamerican cultures and the Aztecs' first syncretism; the colonial process which brought a new syncretism mixing the native mythology with elements of the imposed Christian faith of the Spanish conquerors; the institutionalization of the *Día de Muertos* festivity through the promotion by the government; the popular appropriation of the celebration, regardless of the social class, geographic region, ethnic group or economic difficulties.

Aside from the Secretary of Education with its different programs, other government institutions have also created spaces to publicize the Day of the Dead festivity, such as the Secretary of Tourism. Promoted as a tourist-attracting festivity, some unique features bring people from all over the world to attend the celebrations that take place in graveyards and houses as well as in churches or museums. Powered by these interventions companies have produced mass market goods to profit from the cultural celebration, copying the traditional indigenous handmade designs which in turn become really inexpensive consumer products.

Thanks to the media the celebration of the Day of the Dead has crossed borders and oceans, but it has also invaded the intimacy of the indigenous festivals and celebrations and produced changes in the traditional activities in favor of a mass marketing spectacle. Capitalism has made the celebration of the Day of the Dead what it is today. Modernity, industrialization, and urbanization have killed the bonds between human beings and nature, the connections between life and death, the ties between the present generations and the ancestors. Thinking about life and death has acquired more importance today when the schooling rate has increased, technologies have advanced, and cultural diversity has spread out. But at the same time people face

wars, social violence, diseases, incomprehensible deaths, and the loss of life's sense, even in countries with the best living conditions. A new area in pedagogy has emerged; it is the pedagogy of death (Rodríguez Herrero et al. 2012; Cagnolata y Hernández, 2015; Herrán Gascón 2015; González et al. 2016; Ramsey and Christie 2018).

We think that the celebration of the Day of Dead is truly a World Heritage. Why? Because this celebration represents an opportunity for reconciliation with others, for honoring the next or distant ancestors, for accepting the ephemeral condition of our individual existence. It also offers awareness for us the living as we are just a link in a chain of human constructions; we are a piece in the assembly between past and future. We must become aware that life and death form a never ending circle, that death is a part of life.

References

AM news. (2018). Ya vienen las 'luminarias'. In *AM news.* Retrieved on July 10, 2018, from https://www.am.com.mx/celaya/vidas/ya-vienen-las-luminarias-158365.html

Arqueología Mexicana. (2013). *La muerte en México de la época prehispánica a la actualidad.* Número especial 52.

Arredondo, A. (1987). Origen y significado de la tradición de Muertos. In *En Torno al Día de Muertos* (pp. 12–26). México: Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua.

Arredondo, A., & González, R. (2014). De la secularización a la laicidad educativa en México. Historia de la Educación. *Anuario Sociedad Argentina de Historia de la Educación, 15*(2), 140–167.

Arredondo, A., Limón, A., & Piñón, V. (1987). *En torno al Día de Muertos*. México: Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua.

Ballestas, L. H. (2015). *Las representaciones Implícitas en las Formas Esquemáticas Prehispánicas. Un enfoque gráfico comparativo de la cultura material de México y Colombia.* México: UNAM. Retrieved on July 20, 2018, from http://www.posgrado.unam.mx/mesoamericanos/uploads/docs/ESQUEMQTICA%20LHB-2016.pdf

Barbosa, A. (2010). La comunidad difunta en el imaginario Indígena Mexicano. Inventio. *La génesis de la cultura universitaria en Morelos, 7*(13), 19–27.

Bennet, C., & Zingg, R. (1978). *Los Tarahumaras, una tribu india del norte de México*. México: Instituto Nacional Indigenista.

Buenfil, V., Ramayo, T., & Rodríguez, J. C. (2018). *Hanal Pixan: Alimento de las ánimas*. México: Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán. Retrieved on July 6, 2018, from http://www.mayas.uady.mx/articulos/pixan.html

Cagnolata, A. & Herández H. J. L. (2015). *La pedagogía ante la muerte: reflexiones e interpretaciones en perspectiva histórica, Simposio de la historia de la educación. Actas*. Salamanca: Faren House. Retrieved on May 12, 2018, from http://www.fahrenhouse.com/omp/index.php/fh/catalog/book/13

Carrasco, R. (1999). Tumbas reales de Calakmul. Ritos funerarios y estructura de poder. In Arqueología Mexicana, 40: 28-31.

Carrasco, R., Dérozier, C., & Molinié-Bertrand, A. (2001). *Histoire et civilisation de l'Espagne classique. 1492–1808*. Paris: Nathan.

Caruso, I. (1981). *La separación de los amantes*. México: Siglo XXI.

Caso, A. (1987). *El pueblo del sol*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

CDI (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas). *La Vigencia de los Derechos Indígenas en México*. México: CDI. Retrieved on May 31, 2015, from http://www.cdi.gob.mx/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=187&Itemid=200014

CONACULTA (2018). (Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes). *Calaveritas*. México: CONACULTA. Retrieved on May 31, 2018, from http://www.conaculta.gob.mx/detalle-nota/?id=16743

De Landa, D. (2018). *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán*. XXXIII. Duelos. Entierros de los sacerdotes. Retrieved on July 26, 2018, from http://www.wayeb.org/download/resources/landa.pdf

Dehouve, D. (2010). Ritos sangrientos. *Letras Libres*. *Number 13*. Retrieved on May 31, 2015, from http://www.danieledehouve.com/images/articles/Ritos_sangrientos.pdf.

Díaz del Castillo, B. (1979). *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (Vol. 1–2). México: Promexa Editores.

Elton, G. R. (1984). *La Europa de la Reforma 1517–1559*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores.

Gallegos, M. (2015). *José Guadalupe* Posada, la muerte y la cultura popular mexicana. *125*. Retrieved on May 3, 2015, from http://newpagecomunicacion.sociales.uba.ar/files/2013/02/1245.pdf.

García, A. D. (2013). De Nahuales y dueños en las montañas mexicanas. *Apachita, number 20* (pp. 9–21). Retrieved on July 21, 2018, https://www.usfq.edu.ec/publicaciones/apachita/Documents/.../apachita_20_003.pdf

García, M. C., & Watson, J. T. (2018). El cementerio prehispánico del valle de Ónavas, Sonora. *Arqueología Mexicana, 154*, 63–68.

González Gómez, S., Pérez Miranda, I., & Gómez Sánchez, A. M. (Eds.). (2016). *Mors certa, hora incerta. Tradiciones, representaciones y educación ante la muerte*. Salamanca: Fahren House. Retrieved on July 18, 2018, from http://www.fahrenhouse.com/omp/index.php/fh/catalog/book/20

González Obregón, L. (1910). *México viejo. Época Colonial. Noticias históricas, tradiciones, leyendas y costumbres*. México: Librería de la Viuda de Charles Bouret.

González Pérez, Y. (1979). *El culto a los astros entre los Mexicas. No. 217*. México: SepSetentas.

Gutiérrez, A. (2013). Mixquic: el pueblo de los muertos más vivos. *Proceso*, October 25. Retrieved on July 10, 2018, from https://www.proceso.com.mx/356307/mixquic-el-pueblo-de-los-muertos-mas-vivos

Herrán, A., & Cortina, M. (2015). *Fundamentos para una pedagogía de la muerte*, Retrieved on August 10, 2018, from https://rieoei.org/historico/deloslectores/1769Herran.pdf

Herrán Gascón, de la A. (2015). *Pedagogía radical e inclusiva y educación para la muerte*. Salamanca: FahrenHouse. Retrieved on July 15, 2018, from http://www.fahrenhouse.com/omp/index.php/fh/catalog/book/19

Kickeberg, W. (1985). *Las antiguas culturas mexicanas*. México: FCE.

Kickeberg, W. (1994). *Mitos y leyendas de los Aztecas, Incas, Mayas y Muiscas*. México: FCE.

Lafaye, J. (1978). *Los Conquistadores*. México: Siglos XXI Editores.

León Portilla, M. (1977). *Los Antiguos Mexicanos a través de sus crónicas y cantares*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Lomnitz, C. (2013). *La idea de la muerte en México*. México: FCE.

López Austin, A. (2002). La enseñanza escolar entre los Mexicas. In B. Mílada (Ed.), *Ideas, valores y tradiciones. Ensayos sobre historia de la educación en México*. Toluca: El Colegio Mexiquense, A. C.

Loyo Bravo, E. (2002). Una educación para el Pueblo, 1910–1940. In B. Mílada (Ed.), *Ideas, valores y tradiciones. Ensayos sobre historia de la educación en México*. Toluca: El Colegio Mexiquense, A. C.

Matos Moctezuma, E. (1975). *Muerte a filo de Obsidiana.* México: SepSetentas.

Matos Moctezuma, E. (2013). La muerte entre los mexicas: expresión particular de una realidad universal. *Arqueología Mexicana, E52*, 8–15.

McManners, J. (1981). *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing attitudes to death among Christians and unbelievers in eighteenth century France*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Motolinía, T., & De, B. (1971). *Memoriales o Libro de las Cosas de la Nueva España y de los Naturales de Ella*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
Novo, S. (1974). *México y la Muerte y Muertos*. México: SepSetentas No. 153.
Ollivier Pérez, H. (2011). Acerca de las Manifestaciones Culturales del Día de Muertos, Circular No. 160/2011. SEV (Secretaría de Educación Pública del Estado de Veracruz). Retrieved on April 19, 2015, from http://tecped-dges-ver.blogspot.mx/2011/10/circular-acerca-de-las-manifestaciones.html
Paz, O. (1982). *El laberinto de la soledad*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
Piñón, V. (1987). El Culto a la Muerte entre los Rarámuris. In *En Torno al Día de Muertos*. México: Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua.
Porcayo, M. A., & Rojas, J. M. C. (2018). *Keruk.* Tratamiento mortuorio entre los norbajacalifornianos. In *Arqueología Mexicana* (Vol. 154, pp. 36–43).
Portal de México, El. (2015). Retrieved on August 14, 2015, from http://www.elportaldemexico.com/arte/literatura/calaveritas.htm
Portal Turístico de Pátzcuaro Michoacán. (2015). Retrieved on August 19, 2015 http://www.patzcuaro.com/festividades/dia_muertos.html
Pozas Arciniega, R. (1952). *Juan Pérez Jolote, Biografía de un Tzotzil*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
Ramsey, A., & Christie, B. (2018). Facing loss: Pedagogy of death. *Environmental Education Research*. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2018.1446511.
Rodríguez Álvarez, M. (2009). *Usos y costumbres funerarias en la Nueva España*. Zamora, Michoacán: El Colegio de Michoacán, El Colegio Mexiquense.
Rodríguez-Herrero, P., De-La-Herrán-Gascón, A., & Cortina-Selva, M. (2012). Antecedentes de la pedagogía de la muerte en España. *Enseñanza & Teaching: Revista Interuniversitaria de Didáctica* [Internet] 30(2): 175–195. Retrived on July 20 2018, from http://revistas.usal.es/index.php/0212-5374/article/view/9320
Rosales, L. A., & Sánchez, L. E. G. (2018). Así morían los antiguos californios. *Arqueología Mexicana, 154*, 50–55.
Sabatier, R. (1970). *Diccionario Ilustrado de la Muerte*. Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo.
Sahagún, B. (1971). Ritos y costumbres aztecas. In Á. Masia (Ed.), *Historiadores de Indias. Pages?* Barcelona: Bruguera.
Sahagún, B. (2012). *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*. México: Red Ediciones S.L.
SEP (Secretaría de Educación Pública). *Ley general de educación.* México: SEP. Retrieved on May 31, 2015 from http://www.sepbcs.gob.mx/legislacion/ley_general_educacion.htm
Sol de Parral, El. (2013). Tradición de altares de muerto tomó auge en el norte desde los 80's. *El Sol de Parral*, Retrieved on April 19, 2015, from http://www.oem.com.mx/elsoldeparral/notas/n3178336.htm
UNAM. Correr al muerto. *Diccionario enciclopédico de la medicina tradicional Mexicana.* Accessed July 17, 2018. Retrieved on July 8, 2018, from http://www.medicinatradicionalmexicana.unam.mx/termino.php?l=1&t=correr%20al%20muerto
UNESCO. Lista Representativa del Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial de la Humanidad de la UNESCO. Retrieved on May 31, 2015 from http://www.unesco.org/new/es/mexico/work-areas/culture/intangible-heritage/
Valenzuela, J. G., & Santos, V. J. R. (2018). El uso de urnas como elemento funerario en Loma del Tecomate, Chametla, Sinaloa. *Arqueología Mexicana, 154*, 69–75.
Vilar, P. (1980). *Historia de España*. Barcelona: Editorial Grijalbo.
Villarreal Acosta, A. (2013). *La representación de la muerta en la literatura mexicana. Formas de su imaginario.* Doctoral dissertation. Retrieved on January 16, 2016, from http://eprints.ucm.es/22384/1/T34654.pdf
Villalpando, E., & Watson, J. T. (2018). Pintados de rojo. Prácticas funerarias de los primeros agricultores del desierto de Sonora. *Arqueología Mexicana, 154*: 56.62.

Continuity and Ruptures in Brazilian Funeral Rites

Marisete T. Hoffmann-Horochovski and José Miguel Rasia

Abstract This chapter aims to analyze changes and continuity in funeral rites in the south of Brazil, both in rural and urban settings. To that end, the authors have used ethnography and oral history in order to conduct research on the social representations of death and the changes surrounding Catholic funeral rites. The results achieved have shown that funeral rites have undergone transformations in recent decades, in both settings. In cities, however, changes have been greater, arising both from the urbanization process, as well as the desocialization of death. Generally, funeral rites, which are organized by morticians, have been abbreviated and simplified. Emotions are restrained. In the conclusion, we note that these changes do not impact the importance of funerals, whose function is enabling the passage from the world of the living to the world of the dead and to bring safety and protection to the living.

Keywords Death · Funeral rites · Catholicism

Introduction

Writing about death in Brazil is not an easy task, because this country's sociocultural diversity means that there are different ways of thought and representation. Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world, with a territory of 8,514,876 km^2 and a population of about 208 million inhabitants, according to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE (2017). 76% of Brazilians live in urban settings. Its history of colonization and miscegenation (indigenous natives, African blacks, and Portuguese whites, and later other Europeans and also Asians) explain its agrarian development and later industrialization, as well as its regional specificities. Each of the five regions of the country carries the signature of its colonization and its socioeconomic and cultural formation processes.

M. T. Hoffmann-Horochovski (✉) · J. M. Rasia
Federal University of Paraná, Curitiba, Brazil
e-mail: marisetehh@gmail.com

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_15

Countless territorialities are contained within this larger territory. In rural settings, besides farmer communities, there are several traditional communities that struggle to ensure their economic and cultural survival, to the point that a National Policy for the Sustainable Development of Traditional Peoples and Communities (PNPCT) was created in 2007. These communities are, according to Litle (2015), indigenous, *quilombolas* (communities comprised of descendants of African slaves), agricultural-extractivists (small rural farmers that also extract/gather natural resources), cattle farmers and marine and river fishermen. Each of those groups has particular characteristics and unique understandings of death and its rituals, though clear similarities are also present. In several of them, despite what happens in major cities, death is not relegated to the background of average life, as said by Elias (2001); in Ariès's (1981, 1989) perspective, death as a topic is not denied or prohibited.

In this diverse scenario, the goal of this chapter is to ponder on death and the continuity and discontinuity of funeral rites in Southern Brazil, which includes a strong presence of European settlers (Italians, Germans, Poles, Ukrainians, and others). This is done through coordinated studies performed by the authors at the rural community of Colônia Santo Antônio (Ijuí), in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, and studies developed in urban settings, more precisely in the city of Curitiba, capital of the state of Paraná (Image 1). The intent is to analyze how Catholic funeral rites have changed over time in rural and city settings, underscoring their key features, as well as assessing the differences regarding the type of death – whether it occurs naturally or violently.

The studies that allowed these reflections – conducted over a period of approximately 20 years (in the 1990s and 2000s) – have employed ethnography and oral history, as well as participant-observation techniques, to understand the change and continuity surrounding the symbolic universe of death. Individual recollections, related to the memory of collectivity (Halbwachs 2004), allow us to remember the past from the present and to tell stories that have helped unveil changes in funeral rites and types of death. This methodological approach allowed us to expand the timeline of reflections contained herein, from the mid-twentieth century to the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The studies took into consideration the literature on changes in the symbolic universe of death in the first decades of the twentieth century. These changes culminated with the disappearance of the good death, immortalized in the image of a dying man in bed, saying farewell to his family and making his final recommendations. Gradually, the public and familiar death has been replaced by interdicted death, which deprives individuals of preparing for death and sharing their last moments, with the support of their family, a medical team, and social group (Ariès 1989; Thomas 1995). With the transfer from the deathbed to the hospital, a lonely and silent death became the standard, and funeral rites have been gradually simplified and accelerated while still fulfilling their role as a passage from a certain status (alive) to another (death), providing safety to the individual and the group (Gennep 1992; Thomas 1985). From this theoretical reference, it is possible to analyze how funeral rites in rural and urban settings have changed and stayed the same.

Image 1 Map of Southern Brazil. (Source: By Luiz Fernando Zelinski)

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, we seek to understand funeral rites in the small community of Colônia Santo Antônio, where changes in the universe of death seem to have been subtler than in large cities. In the second, we analyze funeral rites in Curitiba, highlighting changes that arose in recent decades which, according to Thomas (1985), point to a desocialization of death: simplification, acceleration, and restraining of emotions. The last part includes our final considerations.

Funeral Rites in Rural Brazil

Colônia Santo Antônio is a small community of family farmers, located in the rural area of Ijuí, in rural Rio Grande do Sul. The city was established in 1890 in a region that has received many immigrants – Italians, Germans, Poles, and Russians – due to a Brazilian government policy of attracting European immigrants and the European scenario at the end of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth century. These immigrants established rural communities and urban nuclei. In the specific case of Colônia Santo Antônio, its inhabitants are Italian descendants. This defines a group identity in which participants consider themselves Italians and

Catholics – to the point that the first two generations in the community spoke Italian and Portuguese (Costa 1990). Inhabitants who belong to the second and third generations of immigrants participated in the study. The study aimed to examine local representations of death.

The inhabitants are small farm owners who employ a family workforce, with the average property size being 25 ha. At the time of the study, in the 1990s, the 35 families in the community planted wheat and soybeans and conducted other activities aimed at family subsistence, such as raising animals (cows, pigs, and chickens) and growing fruits and vegetables.

Several studies have shown the endurance of family relations in capitalist production and the subordination of family work to capital, which has changed the technical grounds for farm work (Green and Rocha dos Santos 1993; Wanderley 2000; Brandenburg et al. 2007). In the context of a production aimed at capitalist markets, small producers still retain a degree of autonomy that grants them some control over labor and their relations with other members within the same social category. On the one hand, capital – as an external element to the community – and the elements that facilitate its dominance (e.g. technology, technical knowledge) redefine the role of farmers in the process of social labor division and limits of accumulation. On the other hand, they are driving the learned community to overexploit the land and to intensify the use of family labor, empowered by the incorporation of machinery into the production process. These changes in traditional labor organization have found its first results in the social disorganization of the group since not all family members dedicate themselves to farming activities. The social disorganization of traditional production methods and the technology incorporated with them began to cause an impact in the traditional forms of family and community organization. Several of the adult children of small family farmers had already started looking for positions in urban labor, education, or marrying individuals from other communities that were less impacted by modernization. The formation of new families within a single property had started to become unfeasible. These strategies – urban job market, education, marrying outside the community – are a means to face the conditions imposed by the capitalist modernization of agriculture in the region and the resulting social disorganization. Despite this, family and community continue to act as the core of solidarity and values for all their members, even those who have moved away in search of other ways to live.

Announcing Death and Funeral Rites

The studied group understands death according to the circumstances in which it happens. The desire is for an announced death (Ariès 1989), which can be accompanied by the community, generally due to the advanced age of the individual or by prolonged illness. Violent and sudden death are forms that farmers are not able to explain; they are always deaths that should not have occurred, particularly those of children and youth. In other words, a temporal conception linked to natural time is

predominant in the group; the duration of life is analogous to the life cycle of plants and animals. In that sense, life is seen as a succession of stages that must be fulfilled.

The ideal death is a death with relatives and friends; an expected death is a prepared death. Prepared death is precisely that in which the dying persons, their family and friends are all aware of the development of the disease and its irreversible result. In that condition, not only do the dying persons, but also their entire close circle, which generally encompasses the whole community, know they will die. The monitoring of a disease, whether in the hospital or at home (Heredia 2013) is a desire manifested by all farmers, who expect that death may be monitored and thus acknowledged spontaneously (Ariès 1989).

In stories told by the inhabitants, it is common to hear of the dying person remembering friends and relatives who did not come to say goodbye. There are always a few absences, as even with the sadness surrounding death, everyone wants to be present so that it is not a lonely affair:

> When mom died … Everyone knew she was going to die, and so did she. In her time of dying, she gathered all sons and daughters, we said: "bless us, mom." With a weak voice, she replied, "God bless you." Within the hour, she had died, serenely, she looked very calm.

Moraes (1993, p.53), who collected these testimonials, noted that "these people have died in their homes, in their own beds… When someone is nearing death, the community is forewarned, they visit the dying person's house often and discreetly, bringing loaves and cakes."

The habit of bringing food when visiting reinforces trades among community members and is a way to help the family of the dying person, while also being an expression of condolences to the family that is involved with the imminent death, with no time to handle domestic chores: "When we visit we bring something to eat, because when someone in the house is ill, everyone gets a little bit dazed and unable to handle everything. That's when friends help…".

Prolonged suffering and illness, though undesired, are seen as necessary among farmers, because they consider the duration of the disease as important for the dying persons, their family and friends to be able to prepare for the passing. Those interviewed expressed the desire to die in a way that their deaths could be experienced by themselves and others. The importance of witnessing that moment helps us understand the dimension of death in Catholic religious practices, which is seen as a moment of passage from life on Earth to life in Heaven. This passage, marked by the presence of others, concludes by placing a lit candle in the hands of the dying person, so as to light his way: "Light, which belongs to the living and is alive, is a donation from the living to the dead, it is the means that the living use to control and guide the soul, to take them from the place of the living to the place of the dead" (Martins 1983, 265). Thus, the witness fulfills their first role in the ritual: accompanying the change of the individual's status. Accompanying the family and the dying person, showing solidarity and helping the family and the dying person is mandatory for all community members.

Personal possessions are distributed on the event of death, in compliance with a gift-based trade regime (Caillé 2002; Godelier 2001; Mauss 2003), as a final means of repayment for the dying person. In one case observed during the study, this comprised a Saint Rita medallion, a wedding band, a wedding dress, and a cast iron pan. Moraes (1993) reports that some interviewees showed him the "inherited personal possessions" as riches passed from generation to generation in the community. In many cases, the personal possessions are distributed well before any illness, though the delivery is done during the dying person's final moments or after death.

Another example that reveals the relations of the living to the dead was presented by Joaquim, who pointed to a chair and a tableware cabinet, saying: "note the quality in these, so beautiful, so well done; this was the precision in the work of my father". He raised the chair and showed marks on the floor, proudly stating that no one would move those objects from where they are for as long as he lives. From these signs of the meaning of "inherited personal possessions", we can clearly see the role attributed to blood and friendship relations within the community, and the ritual importance of the time immediately preceding death among the group. This is the preparation for death in Colônia Santo Antônio.

When death occurs, the body begins to be prepared with a ritual bath. This comprises washing the body behind closed doors and is generally performed by one or two older women. Of the interviewed women, only two had never prepared a corpse. The bath is done in the room where the death happened and consists of washing the body with scented soap. Among the study participants, no men had performed this role.

> At night, someone called me at the gate: "Dirce, come here for a second." It was the teacher. "Look, they're calling you, Mrs. Luzia has rested and you are supposed to go help get the body ready." I thought, I've done it once, I'll do it again… then I went… I got there and she was lying in bed, dead, with no one in the room. I asked her daughter if someone would do the preparation, to which she responded: she is my mother, may she forgive me, but I'm not doing it…

In general, relatives or closest friends take precedence regarding the choice of who is bathing and preparing the dead body. When these people decline, the preparing ladies stand in. In Colônia, it is always done by someone in the dead person's circle of friends. Offering the task to a family member is a protocol obligation of the preparing ladies – older women who not only perform that role but also grant blessings and act as midwives, which grants them a certain moral and spiritual leadership among the community. It is part of the attributions in the role of preparing ladies to offer the tasks to the relatives of the deceased. A refusal is expected, as the relatives are considered interdicted as they are busy mourning the dead. To the men in the family, this is the moment to enlist friends willing to dig the grave, while the women prepare a room for the wake. The distribution of activities that comprise this set of rituals is defined according to the positions held within the family. Preparing the dead, digging the grave, and preparing the room of the wake are part of the circuit of symbolic exchanges among the community. The preparing ladies, because they are not from the circle of relatives, have some prestige over the group as well as certain moral obligations due to their elevated social status. Preparing ladies, in a system of acknowledgment distribution, are considered as repayment creditors not

only by families but by the community. Repayment is usually done via gifts and invitations to take part in celebrations that the family considers most important, such as baptisms and weddings.

During our time in the field, the death of one inhabitant allowed us to experience the set of rituals that follow the preparation of the body. Pedro had been one of the first settlers in Colônia. He was 83 years old and died suddenly due to a cerebrovascular accident. His advanced age and a history of previous illnesses led relatives and the community to accept this death as a natural passing, as opposed to other sudden deaths.

The preparing ladies dress the body in the best outfit he has, or with clothes purchased for that purpose (new suit and shoes). The coffin is covered with flower decorations and surrounded by four large candlesticks with lit candles. A sign with biblical sayings was placed at the head of the coffin. At his feet, there is a glass of holy water, and a cypress branch for the elderly to bless themselves and the deceased.

The wake, or watch of the body, happens in the living room of the house, or in the Chapel Hall. In that case, because he was one of the first inhabitants of the settlement, the wake was held in the Hall. The family and most community members take part. As the wake lasts for 24 h, people take turns. Children take part in the wake, praying along with the adults, but they do not stay in the hall all the time and are free to enter and leave the hall to play in the chapel grounds.

The inhabitants of Colônia Santo Antônio spend the entire night mourning the body. In that period, they are served cookies, coffee, *grappa,* and *cachaça*. People eat and drink in silence. Those who wish to talk go to the grounds and topics revolve around the life of the deceased, his illness, farm work, life in the settlement, and jokes. This is done to disperse the tense and solemn atmosphere within the hall.

In the morning, the wake continues with several people of the community and also school children, who are dismissed from class to take part in funerals and burials. A group of women spontaneously moves into the kitchen to prepare lunch for those attending. This lunch is an offering to the grieving family, who take part in the meal along with others. The table is set in a room next to the wake, everyone eats in silence, and no drinks are served. The food is quite simple, some salad, wheat bread (baked by a female inhabitant for the occasion), and rice with chicken or *carreteiro* rice (rice cooked with jerky), which are common dishes in Southern Brazil.

This lunch can be seen as a ritual feast which serves to strengthen bonds among community members and offer support to the family of the dead. Its roots are in the tradition of rustic catholicism (Queiroz 1968) which offers tokens to the dead, mixed with Italian traditions of commemorative parties. Here, the difference in comparison to profane parties is that the table is quiet, and the few conversations that happen revolve around the deceased. After the feast, everyone returns to the hall to prepare for the burial. A day with a wake and burial is a day with no other activities in the community. Those attending say farewell to the deceased with individual prayers. Then the body is consecrated.

A Eucharistic minister or a deacon is responsible for consecrating the body. Those attending are invited to stand around the coffin. The inner circle is composed of the family members. The other circles are composed of friends and distant rela-

tives. The head of the ceremony stands at the head of the coffin and invites everyone to sing. After the first chant, a credo is spoken and a new chant ensues. This is followed by praying the Rosary while the family says farewell to the deceased. The farewell consists of touching the head of the deceased with a hand and quickly contemplating them. Children repeat what the adults do. After the family, friends have their chance to say farewell. The coffin is closed after being open during the wake and consecration, and a procession follows it into the chapel next to the hall. It is an obligation for the men in the family (sons, grandsons, and other relatives) to perform that task; in their absence, the coffin is carried by the closest friends. The bell tolls and those attending sing a new chant, asking for Our Lady to guide the dead into the Kingdom of Heaven. The women carry flower vases into the Church and from there to the grave site.

After the procession reaches the church, the coffin is placed on a scaffold in front of the altar, and the Funeral Mass takes place. A chant is sung to celebrate the life and virtues of the good Christian. The obituary is read, including a short biography. This is followed by the liturgy, readings from the gospels, and a short speech by the minister aiming to comfort the living. At the offering, the life of the deceased is offered, followed by communion. Then the mass ends. The minister concludes this part of the ritual by blessing the body and asking for mercy. The bell tolls for a long and final time.

The men in the family carry the coffin on their shoulders to the cemetery, followed by the procession. During the burial, everyone cries, as this is the mandatory manifestation of sorrowful feelings for the community (Mauss 1999). Each family member throws three handfuls of dirt onto the coffin, as a way to mark their presence in the ritual and as a last goodbye. Each gesture is followed by a blessing of the grave. Flowers and wreaths are placed on the dais and everyone leaves in silence. Two days after the burial, the women in the family return to the cemetery to remove the wilting flower vases, replacing them with paper flower wreaths. Folding paper flowers is a women's skill which has recently disappeared.

The funeral ritual not only makes death public (Ariès 1989) but also provides a means to renew the bonds of sociability among the living. It reinforces proximity and solidarity among inhabitants. The loss, as a collective experience, reinforces the relations of belonging and acknowledgment; expressing emotion is not only mandatory, but a reaffirmation of the collective identity: "Here we are united, in a single [ethnic] origin, a single language, and a single religion".

In this scenario, which represents much of rural Brazil, death is seen more as the separation between the worlds of the living and the dead than as a rupture. The dead are not excluded from the alterity relations among the living, i.e. they do not become a nonbeing. Speeches by relatives and friends keep the deceased in the role of the other in social relations. The ongoing use of the term *finado* (departed), in conjunction with the name or role played in the family (father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, etc.), is an indication of this. The deceased remains and updates his role not only through memories but also through any material and symbolic achievements that are transmitted. Examples of this are past and concrete actions of obtaining material and moral assets for the family and the community. Material assets are

represented by property: land, trees, animals, the house, the orchard, and anything they achieved with their labor. Moral assets are represented by attitudes, values, and actions they took on behalf of the family and the community. The assets built by the deceased and left to those who remain is thus imbued with a symbolic value to those who receive them:

> Armando, this vineyard is old, why don't you replace it little by little by new grapevines? I reply: My father planted this vineyard, and this is how I can remember him. No, there's no way I would dig it up… I see my father there! This is an heirloom he left me and I will never want to get rid of it. The sacrifices he made to build it… to this day, I collect grapes, sell and make wine…

For the interviewee, the assets have a material value represented by the inclusion of wine into the family income. However, it is noteworthy how the material and symbolic boundaries interweave in this testimonial. The source of income and the presence of the father are thus inseparably united, though we see that the symbolic value takes precedence. In the loss represented by death, the pain and separation is solaced with the clarity of the moral assets transmitted to relatives and friends:

> Our mother always taught us that we had to be good, always do good, not harm anyone. She also taught us the value of hard work and dedication to the house, to the farm. This comforts me, I know I will never have my mother with me, but what she taught will be here forever and I try to teach my children the same: be good, do nothing wrong, and work hard…

This understanding of death represents a separation and absence that are resolved in a symbolic level, since the perenniality of the transmitted values is ensured from generation to generation, with the permanent remembrance of the deceased, whose history is conveyed from the old to the young.

In the case of the family farmers in Colônia Santo Antônio, material assets are distributed in an arrangement between law and agreements established by the family according to Italian tradition. The youngest son inherits the land and undertakes the responsibility of caring for the parents in their old age. For the remaining children, they attempt to acquire land within the community or in the surrounding areas. Women are excluded from the inheritance, receiving a trousseau when they marry: tablecloths and linens, bedroom furniture, sewing machine, a dairy cow, chickens, and pigs. In situations where there are no male children, the youngest daughter receives the land and cares for the parents.

Maintaining property over the land is a challenge for settlers who live in transition to capitalist methods of production. How do they conciliate the new labor organization with technology employment and small properties? For several of these farmers, with properties under 25 ha, the solution was renting farming machinery; for others, it was their collective purchase and use. In most cases, the rental of machinery is paid by trading days of labor between lessor and lessee. What allows this exchange is the low occupation of the machinery by their owners due to the size of the land they cultivate and the fact they all belong to the same circle of solidarity. Rentals are not a monetary exchange relationship by excellence, facilitated by a business agreement, but a relationship between neighbors. The only expense that is repaid in currency or in products is fuel. Thus, both the rental of machinery and the

transmission of property follow a moral code taught by the elders, which has been perpetuated since the establishment of Colônia. This reaffirms the hypothesis of continuity of the deceased, as expressed in the maintenance of individual and communal values: "…My departed father was someone who taught people, he taught us to respect our elders, to address them as sir, madam… today, nobody says sir anymore, it's you everywhere… They taught us respect, charity toward the poor, and not to swindle anyone."

Another important element in the relation of continuity between the living and the dead is the distribution of personal possessions (household and work objects) when parents die. This distribution is always established in life. The elders indicate the objects and their recipients, who will generally be their children, grandchildren, and very close friends. The objects hold a special symbolic value, both to the donor and the recipient - they represent the desire not to be forgotten and to remain in the other's memories. The object given represents acknowledgment and affection in the family and community tradition in which expressing feelings is not done frequently and is reserved for special occasions such as the birth of a child. At that time the newborn receives visitors and gifts, baptisms, chrisms (consecrated oil), first communions, and weddings (Rasia et al. 1995).

Funeral Rites in Urban Brazil

Curitiba is a city with the eighth largest population in Brazil, 1,908,359 people (IBGE 2017), being the largest in the Southern region of the country. Curitiba, as well as other large Brazilian cities, has undergone modernization and urbanization that significantly desocialized death (Thomas 1985) and its rituals, which have become simplified, accelerated, and with restrained emotions. There have been two studies on death in the capital of the state of Paraná which support these reflections in the first decade of the twenty-first century: social representations of homicide and transformations in the universe of death and funeral rites based on the memory of the elderly, aged 70-99, socialized in Catholicism. Regarding changes in death rites, we have noticed that working with memory allowed the studied elders who experienced those transformations to report in a trustworthy manner.

Change and Continuity in Death Rites

The announced death, which allows time to prepare and express last wills and recommendations (Ariès 1989), is the ideal for the elderly studied in Curitiba, all of them Catholics. Similarly to what happens in the rural setting, the dying person wishes to share their final moments with their loved ones and reconcile with God. In the case of most devout Catholics, this announcement enables the dying to confess, take communion, and receive the final rites, expiating their sins and purifying

their soul, while also allowing for the necessary farewells. This rite offers safety to the dying and the living, who feel more protected to face death and the suffering it represents.

In the city, announced death generally occurs in hospital spaces, which have currently become the place to die. With the advent of palliative care in Brazil beginning in the early 2000s, there have been recent indications of an opposing movement by (re)displacing the deathbed to houses. Such multidisciplinary care is usually enacted when there are no more therapeutic alternatives and aims to provide greater quality and less suffering during the person's final moments, allowing the dying to remain unsedated with their loved ones (Gawande 2015).

Sudden death, whether natural or violent, initially does not allow for this preparation. It does not allow farewells and recommendations to the loved ones. It does not allow communion and final rites for Catholics, leaving in doubt whether the individual has reconciled with God in their final moments. In that regard, both the conduct held in life and the final instants may allow for a good death, even if it an abrupt one. In other words, the moments before sudden death can be decisive in the passage from this life to the afterlife. This is clear in the narrative of one of the interviewed elders:

> I think it depends on the life and on that moment… in an accident, it is sad, it is horrible, because the person is not expecting it… but if at that moment they choose, let's say, to repent and to choose God, they acknowledge God as the lord in their life.

The moment of death marks the start of the funeral rituals, which may be divided into separation, margin and aggregation/integration (Gennep 1992; Thomas 1985). As we have seen previously, the first stage involves caring for deceased's hygiene, i.e. washing and preparing the corpse. This process is done by funeral professionals who use sanitized practices to disinfect the body and makeup to make the deceased look presentable. The intention is to make the deceased look as if they were still alive.

Several of the studied elders did nonetheless remember the time when these duties fell into the hands of family members, friends or preparing ladies, as observed in Colônia Santo Antônio. They recalled the time when friends prepared the body for the wake. One of the elderly reports that she had personally helped prepare the body of a neighbor and that this helped her overcome her fear of the dead. Another person states that she helped prepare the coffin, decorating it with white flowers, to make it "nice and pretty". Besides the flowers, which are still used in funeral homes, in the middle of the century, it was common to dress the deceased in black and place a Rosary in their hands. The Rosary is still widely used by Catholics, but black Rosaries are becoming less common both for the dead and for friends and family, due to the fact that grief is in practice no longer expressed publicly (Hoffmann-Horochovski and Rasia 2011; Hoffmann-Horochovski 2013).

The rituals proceed with the wake or, as the elders call it, the watch of the body. At this stage, the rite has a double function involving the living and the dead. First, it is the moment to mourn and say goodbye to the dead and to also strengthen the bonds of social solidarity between the family and the group. Attending the wake is

both a way to show individual respect and a social obligation. Second, the vigil aims to ensure the separation of soul and body, avoiding any kind of contact of the dead with the living (they must follow their path beyond peacefully).

Until a few decades ago, wakes were held at the house of the deceased. The clock, stopped at the time of the death, symbolically suspended time. Curtains were often drawn and mirrors covered. Everything was carefully organized to revere the deceased, who was never alone, but always surrounded by relatives, friends, and neighbors. The body was never left alone. During the watch, they prayed the Rosary, sang religious chants and lit candles, all to guide the soul of the deceased to God; tales of their achievements exalted their memory. Children took part in the wake, but as was observed in Colônia Santo Antônio, they were not allowed to play in the part of the house where the coffin was. It is important to highlight that the body watching went on during the night, and neither the deceased nor their family were alone. In that period, someone (a distant relative or friend) would cook something for the attendees, who left the room to eat and rest and would later rejoin the vigil. The process was quite similar to the feast portrayed by Rasia et al. (1995). Until the early 2000s it was still possible to find home wakes in the outskirts of Curitiba and other large cities. Today they are almost exclusively held in funeral chapels, and for shorter periods. For safety reasons, during the night the room is closed and the wake resumes the following morning.

After the body is watched, the procession begins, as Dionísio states.

> The wake was held at home. We spent the night in vigil. The following day, the procession would follow a cart drawn by two white horses. Did you not know that? The procession would go from here [Bacacheri Neighborhood] to the city cemetery, it would last one and a half, two hours. At the time, you almost never saw a car, the person who had a car would be "Mr. Someone".

The coffin was carried to the church where the funeral mass was held and/or to the cemetery by a horse cart, followed by relatives and friends. The duration of the procession depended on the distance from the house of the deceased to the cemetery where he would be buried. In the case of this testimonial, it took around 2 h.

The procession had distinguishing features depending on the socioeconomic status of the deceased. Generally, the coffin was carried in a cart drawn by two horses. In the funeral of poorer families, the coffin was carried by those attending the procession. In the funeral of wealthier families, the cart was drawn by four richly-dressed horses, guided by a funeral agent wearing a master's coat, boots, and a black top hat, Antônio said. "Four horses, all covered in black… white horses, covered in black…" Thus, the social distinction was noticeable in funeral services and in the graves that house the dead. Cemeteries reflect the inequalities found in a class-based society.

The number of people attending funeral rituals is also significant. The more well-regarded the deceased and the tighter the communal bonds, the greater the attendance by the living. Reciprocity, support to the family, and respect toward the dead are among the reasons that justify attendance. Public persons are mourned in public places, and always draw a large number of attendees. On that topic, Celso said:

"One time, I saw the burial of a politician that had died: the [military] police band played funeral music behind him. I saw that… Simpler burials, fewer people." The burial of someone important was and still is filled with solemnity. Another interviewed elder states: "A public person, even more so, they must have those uniformed guards fully equipped there during the entire wake."

Celso, a retired public servant, sums up the distinction regarding funeral services and the number of attendees, as well as the changes to the procession: "I know that burials were all according to the person's means, the burial had more people. There were small burials, large burials, all on foot. After automobiles came along, they adapted automobiles into it, but also moving slowly."

The interviewee remembers the replacement of horse-drawn funeral carts by automobiles. At first, the car was followed by a procession on foot; as time passed by, with the growth of cities and the modernization process, the procession was done only by car. This procession still exists, but it generally occurs only when the wake is held in a funeral chapel far from the cemetery. In that case, the procession is followed only by family and close friends. It is however more common for the wake to be performed in a chapel at the cemetery where the body will be buried, and the procession is restricted to the cemetery grounds.

Present day processions are discreet. Often, before the coffin is sealed or removed from the chapel (the coffin is often closed during the wake) there is a religious blessing for the soul to find eternal peace. Once closed, the coffin is removed from the chapel by morticians and placed in a car that covers the distance within the cemetery; flowers are placed on it in homage to the deceased. Afterward, all attendees silently follow the car to the grave site, where the coffin is placed. Final prayers are given, and then flowers are thrown onto the coffin. The grave is closed and the burial ends with the silent departure of the attendees.

Changes in the symbolic universe of death seek to make death hygienic, painless and inodorous. Thus, cremation has become an increasingly popular practice (Thomas 1985) and offered services vary according to the will of the family and what they are able to spend. In Brazil, this practice expanded mainly in the early 2000s, however, it is still not widely accepted among the majority of the population, whether due to costs or the social representations of the dead body. Despite variations, cremation usually includes a farewell ceremony in homage to the deceased, with musical performances (sacred or profane) exalting their qualities and achievements. One of the interviewees, when referring to the cremation of her mother, said the songs in honor of Mary, mother of God and intercessor for the living and the dead, were deeply touching. After the farewell ceremony, the body is incinerated and the ashes are placed in urns of varying styles and prices, which may or may not be taken by the family. They may opt to rent a small place at the crematorium, where a picture of the deceased, the urn, and some personal items are exhibited to form a small memorial. This space can be visited by family and friends, similarly to a cemetery grave.

Cremation or burial is the final ritual homage that marks the separation between the world of the living and the world of the dead. It ends the separation rites (Thomas 1985) or margin rites, in which the dead is neither here nor beyond (Gennep 1992),

and begins the marginal period for survivors (Thomas 1985; Gennep 1992), when several symbolic conducts are performed to appease the living and protect them from possibly harmful effects from beyond. Offerings, candles, and seventh-day requiem masses are examples of this period, which ends with rites of aggregation of the dead to the other world and the suspension of grief. Separation (preliminary), margin (liminary) and aggregation or integration (post-liminary), are essential stages in death rites, as they also work as conditions for grief.

Masses serve to attain salvation for the soul of the deceased and its aggregation into Heaven. For family and close friends, they provide spiritual comfort and social solidarity. Such an example is the seventh-day requiem mass, which is practically mandatory and tends to attract several people, including those that had not attended the other funeral rituals. The one-month requiem mass restricted to family and close friends has practically disappeared, being performed only by observant Catholics. Celebrating a one-year requiem mass is seen as the end of the process of integration of the soul in the afterlife and indicated the end of the period of public displays of grief by the family until the 1960s. Today, the one-year requiem mass is restricted to observant Catholics, and the manifestation of grief is no longer in use, except for the growing exposure through social media, both in rural and urban settings (Hoffmann-Horochovski and Rasia 2011).

The custom of praying for the souls and holding masses, whether on births or on deaths, is common to the elders interviewed in Curitiba and among the farmers in Colônia Santo Antônio. They profess the Catholic faith and believe in the power of prayer and in a continued existence in another realm.

The elders in Curitiba have lived in a time when funeral rituals strengthened social bonds, consisting both as an homage to the deceased and a social obligation. They also consider them a form of repayment, as can be seen in one of their testimonials: “I never miss funerals, because a lot of people came to my wife’s. If it’s a friend, an acquaintance, or relative, I’ll go. In burials, we always meet old friends”.

Visits to graves have become unusual in urban and rural settings. As exemplified by Alberto, most people only visit graves on All Souls Day, a national holiday: “When All Souls Day comes, I go there, think about my parents… The body does not exist anymore, I don’t go there because of the body… I go to think about the time I was with them, that is what matters.”

Based on the memories of Catholic elders, we saw that funeral rites have undergone alterations that translate to changes in the symbolic and social universe of death, indicating its desocialization. The funeral announcement, currently simplified by the use of communication media, notifies of the event, burial and/or seventh-day requiem mass, but without the same commotion of the past. Preparation of the body is no longer performed by family and close friends, but by morticians and other death workers (Kovács et al. 2014) who give the dead a good appearance. Wakes are shortened and seem to lose the aspect of strengthening community bonds. The urban funeral procession moves from the chapel to the grave and generally excludes children. Condolences have become restrained. Public expressions of grief in the presence of the bereaved are no longer common, but are constant on social media; the virtuality of those expressions spares the individuals of contact with the

bereaved and is part of urban sociability. Among farmers, these expressions remain face-to-face. Finally, the cult to the dead, masses and visits to the grave in cemeteries and memorials in crematoriums have become rare and, when they do happen, tend to be restricted to special dates, such as All Souls Day or the birth or death anniversary (Ariès 1989; Thomas 1995, 1985). The exception is the seventh-day requiem mass which, as stated, attracts many attendees.

It is important to highlight that in urban Brazilian settings, as in rural ones, death is presented more as a separation of the worlds of the living and of the dead than as a rupture, at least within the religious universe of Catholicism. The deceased is present in thoughts, prayers, and the discourse of their closest social circle. Their material and moral assets, personal possessions which often assume symbolic significance, are heirlooms that represent this continuity.

"Death holds no secrets," said Elias (2001), and the dead survives in the memory of the living. But the way in which this happens can be significant to the meaning attributed to that continuity. For those interviewed, the ideal death is an announced one, allowing for preparations toward a good Christian death. Sudden death, whether natural or violent, does not allow for that preparation and keeps the living in doubt about whether there was enough time to reconcile with God or not. Therefore, it is not considered ideal, and it is up to the family to pray and recommend the soul to God.

Violent death is particularly not ideal. It does not allow the dying to prepare, nor can his family and friends. Sudden death is caused by external acts (accidents, homicide, and suicide) and promotes feelings of pain, sadness, and often unrest, which are experienced collectively. This type of death is increasingly common in Brazil, particularly in major cities where violence is widespread. The growth of violence and murders points to a trivialization of life. In 2015, there were 59,080 homicides, which means 28.9 deaths per 100 thousand inhabitants. Young uneducated black males, aged 15–29 years old, are the main victims (Cerqueira et al. 2017).

In a study on the social representations of homicide in a peripheral neighborhood in Curitiba, we found that naturalization of violence has become commonplace. Fatal violence enters the public space as fact and as news, as it is exposed in police news sections and becomes a topic for various social groups. But the reaction it causes is not homogeneous. The identity of the deceased seems to reveal emotions and directly interferes with the understanding of death, generating two social expressions: justified and unjustified. The first considers this type of death normal for those who lead undignified lives, marked by choices seen as deviant, in line with the popular motto: *bandido bom é bandido morto* (a good criminal is a dead criminal). The second considers this type of death unjustified because it curtails the lives of honest citizens, victims of the recklessness or violence of another. For that reason, it causes pain and public expressions of grief by the community, with cries for justice and safety (Hoffmann-Horochovski 2007).

Social representations of homicide influence and are influenced by religious beliefs, which deny death by highlighting the immortality of the soul and perform funeral rites to put into effect the passage from the world of the living to the world of the dead. The Catholic religion conducts those rituals regardless of the circumstances of death and the identity of the deceased. This includes suicide victims, who

for centuries had no right to rituals and burial in a Christan cemetery. Today, all rites are performed, according to Ivone, "because nobody knows what was going through the person's mind when they committed that act, nobody can know how they met God." In other words, the passing into the other world is guaranteed by means of funeral rites, but eternal salvation or condemnation fundamentally depend on God.

Conclusion

According to Thomas (1995), death is universal, inescapable, and represents the end of a life cycle due to the failure of the vital functions of an organism. It is a phenomenon that is experienced individually (the person dies) and socially constructed. In all times and spaces, death produces representations and symbolism, which tells much about the organization, history, and culture of social groups. They organize systems of beliefs and ritual practices to deny death as an end, while indicating a continued existence in another world. These are systems related to the ways of dying, practicing rituals, and believing in continuity, all built from a single certainty: human finitude.

Despite the specificities of social groups, there are general trends. In Western society in the twentieth century, in general, there have been social transformations arising from the process of individualization and modernization which have impacted the restructuring of the symbolic universe of death. Death became taboo, an interdicted topic, not often mentioned or invoked. Death gradually moved from homes to hospitals. Death became lonelier, rituals were simplified and accelerated, and emotions restrained.

In this general restructuring scenario, we sought to investigate the continuity and discontinuity of Catholic funeral rites in specific locations in Southern Brazil, in rural and urban settings. The methods employed were ethnography and oral history to understand how the inhabitants of Colônia Santo Antônio (RS) and elderly residents of Curitiba (PR) understand death and its rituals. Through their voices, it was possible to see that changes have been greater in the city, arising both from urbanization and from the desocialization of death. In the rural setting, changes have been subtler.

In Colônia, funeral rituals remain fundamentally important in strengthening the bonds of social solidarity. Wakes and processions are still performed as in the past, but now morticians prepare the body and the grave/tomb. There is a trend of valuing death in the hospital as an indicator of family effort to maintain life.

In the city, there have been countless changes: preparation by morticians, who are not commonly acknowledged for their work (Kovács et al. 2014), shorter wakes in funeral chapels, processions within the cemetery, decrease in the number of masses (except for the seventh-day requiem), and the introduction of cremation. There is a still timid trend toward revaluing death at home when there are no therapeutic alternatives, using palliative care in order to provide quality of life and a good

death to the ill. There are different expressions according to the type of death, whether natural or violent, prepared or sudden.

In both spaces, these changes have not impacted the importance of funeral rituals for the interviewees, who continue to consider announced deaths as ideal. They participate in the ceremonies because they consider it important and believe in the power of prayer for the continued existence in the celestial sphere. They also believe it is important for the continuity of the deceased in the individual memory of the family and the collective memory of the social group, which is strengthened by the material and moral assets that are left as heirlooms.

References

Ariès, P. (1981). *O homem diante da morte*. Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves.

Ariès, P. (1989). *Sobre a história da morte no ocidente*. Lisboa: Teorema.

Brandenburg, A., Ferreira, A., Floriani, D., & Silva, O. H. (Eds.). (2007). *Ruralidades e questões ambientais: estudo sobre estratégias, projetos e políticas*. Brasília: MDA.

Brasil. Decreto n. 6.040, de 7 de fevereiro de 2007, institui a Política Nacional de Desenvolvimento Sustentável dos Povos e Comunidades Tradicionais. 2007. Recuperado em 28, março, 2018, de http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2007-2010/2007/decreto/d6040.htm

Caillé, A. (2002). *Antropologia do dom*. Petrópolis: Vozes.

Cerqueira, D. et al. (2017). Atlas da violência 2017. Rio de Janeiro: IPEA, FBSP. Recuperado em 11, abril, 2018, de http://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/images/170602_atlas_da_violencia_2017.pdf

Costa, I. B. (1990). *O verbo na fala de camponeses: um estudo de variação* (Doctoral thesis on Linguistics). Campinas: UNICAMP/IEL.

Queiroz, M. I. P. de (1968). O catolicismo rústico no Brasil. *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros.* São Paulo: USP, n.5, 104–122.

Wanderley, M.de N. B. (2000). *A valorização da agricultura familiar e a reivindicação da ruralidade no Brasil*. Curitiba: Editora UFPR.

Elias, N. (2001). *A solidão dos moribundos*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar.

Gennep, A. V. (1992). *The rites of passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Godelier, M. (2001). *O enigma do dom*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.

Gawande, A. (2015). *Mortais: Nós, a mediciona e o que realmente importa no final*. Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva.

Green, R. & Rocha dos Santos, R. (Orgs). (1993). *Brésil – Un système agro-alimentaire en transition*. Paris: l'IHEAL.

Halbwachs, M. (2004). *A memória coletiva*. São Paulo: Centauro.

Heredia, M. B. A. d. (2013). *A morada da vida: trabalho familiar de pequenos produtores no Nordeste do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Centro Edelstein de Pesquisas Sociais.

Hoffmann-Horochovski, M. T. (2007). Interdição e exposição da morte. In J. M. Rasia & R. C. F. Giordani (Eds.), *Olhares e questões sobre a saúde, a doença e a morte* (pp. 179–205). Curitiba: Editora UFPR.

Hoffmann-Horochovski, M. T. (2013). *Memórias de morte e outras memórias: lembranças de velhos*. Curitiba: Editora UFPR.

Hoffmann-Horochovski, M. T., & Rasia, J. M. (2011). Rituais fúnebres em memórias de velhos. *Horizonte, Belo Horizonte, 9*(24), 1113–1130.

IBGE. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (2017). Estimativas da população. Recuperado em 29, março, 2018, de https://www.ibge.gov.br/estatisticas-novoportal/sociais/populacao/9103-estimativas-de-populacao.html?=&t=destaques

Kovács, M. J., Vaiciunas, N., & Alves, E. G. R. (2014). Profissionais do serviço funerário e a questão da morte. *Psicologia: Ciência e Profissão, 34*(4), 940–954. https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-370001272013.

Litle, P. (2015). Desenvolvimento territorial sustentável: desafios e potencialidades para o século XXI. *Guaju, Matinhos, 1*(2), 127–143. https://doi.org/10.5380/guaju.v1i2.45039.

Martins, J. S. (1983). A morte e o morto: tempo e espaço nos ritos fúnebres da roça. In J. S. Martins (Ed.), *A morte e os mortos na sociedade brasileira* (pp. 258–269). São Paulo: Hucitec.

Mauss, M. (1999). *Ensaios de sociologia*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.

Mauss, M. (2003). *Sociologia e antropologia*. São Paulo: Cosac & Naify.

Moraes, C. (1993). Rituais fúnebres: tempo e espaço na memória de velhos. Curitiba: UFPR. (monograph).

Rasia, J. M.; Moraes, C., & Rodrigues, E. (1995). Representações da morte entre agricultores da Colônia Santo Antônio – Ijuí (RS). *Revista de Ciências Humanas*, Curitiba, Brasil, 4(4).

Thomas, L. V. (1985). *Rites de mort – pour la paix des vivants*. Paris: Fayard.

Thomas, L. V. (1995). *Antropologie de la mort*. Paris: Payot.

The Right to a Dignified Death in Argentina

Juan Pedro Alonso, Natalia Luxardo, and Javier Roberti

Abstract In this chapter we describe and analyse the public debates on death with dignity in Argentina, from the first attempts to regulate the rights of terminally ill patients to the political process that resulted in the 'death with dignity' Act. Based on documentary sources and sociology of public problems approach we discuss the process of legal change regarding treatment refusal at the end of life. After a short sketch of the history of the debates on death with dignity, we discuss the social and political factors that led to a legal change regarding death with dignity. We posit that the political context and how the debate on end-of-life care was introduced into the public domain explain the legal changes and ethical concerns related to a death with dignity in Argentina.

Keywords Death with dignity · End of life care · Argentina

Introduction

Death and dying in medical practice include many ethical dilemmas. How these are resolved varies across countries, cultures and legal frameworks. In countries with advanced healthcare systems, withdrawing or withholding life-sustaining treatment, assisted suicide and euthanasia have shaped the public debate on end-of-life care in the last few decades.

Advancements in medical technology during the 1950s and 1960s, such as pulmonary ventilation and artificial nutrition, significantly changed the end-of-life experience. The capacity to sustain the function of vital organs created liminal

J. P. Alonso (✉) · N. Luxardo
Instituto de Investigaciones Gino Germani, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina

CONICET, Buenos Aires, Argentina
e-mail: juanpedroalonso79@gmail.com

J. Roberti
FINAER, Buenos Aires, Argentina

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_16

states between life and death and gave rise to debates about technology's potential and limits. Still, decisions on sustaining patients' lives by artificial means and the criteria for withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining treatment were not scrutinised until the mid-1970s. These discussions took force when the physicians' authority on these decisions came into question as a result of several controversial cases (Rothman 1991). The legal ruling in the US in 1976 that allowed Karen Quinlan's parents to disconnect her from the respirator that maintained her in a vegetative state first brought the issue to international attention. Other cases such as those of Nancy Cruzan and Terri Schiavo in the US, Vincent Humbert and Chantal Sébire in France and Dianne Terry and Tony Nicklinson in the UK continued to stir up the debate about the rights of terminally ill patients (Rothman 1991; Dworkin 1993; Richards 2014, 2015).

While attempts to regulate patients' rights go back to the 1930s, when the first societies seeking to legalise euthanasia were founded in the UK and the US, it was not until the 1990s that this field advanced in developed countries. The first act authorising euthanasia was passed by the Northern Territory of Australia in 1994 (McInerney 2000); similar initiatives in the US have been undertaken since 1998 (Hillyard and Dombrink 2001). In 2000, the Dutch Parliament legalised euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. Other countries, Belgium, Colombia, Luxembourg, Canada, Switzerland, and Germany, have followed suit.

In Latin America, the ethics of end-of-life care have not been a major public problem; indeed, debates on euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide and withholding and withdrawing of life-sustaining treatment have very rarely been included in the political agenda in the region. In Argentina, controversies about end-of-life care gained visibility in the last decade because of contentious cases that questioned how death and dying were handled in medical practice. These high-profile cases contributed to a debate leading to enactment of the so-called 'death with dignity' law by the National Congress in 2012. The law protects the right of patients with terminal or irreversible illnesses (or their surrogates) to refuse medical treatment, including life-support, when it is disproportionate to the prospect of improvement or when it prolongs suffering. While the impact of the debates had previously been unheard-of in Argentina, discussion of these issues gave rise to bills and provincial laws intending to regulate end-of-life care in the 1990s.

In this chapter, we describe and analyse the public debates on death with dignity in Argentina, from the first attempts to regulate the rights of terminally ill patients to the political process that resulted in the Death with Dignity Act. How are legal frameworks regarding end of life care established and why do they vary across countries? A number of studies suggest social and cultural factors can explain the enactment of these laws in certain countries (Weyers 2006); others consider how political processes address the interests of the right-to-die supporting movements and how these rights are promulgated (McInerney 2000; Richards 2012, 2015). This chapter follows both perspectives.

Our analysis of debates and policymaking on end-of-life care in Argentina follows a public problem approach. From this perspective, a situation acquires a problem status through a process of social definition, with different parties struggling to

impose an interpretation of the difficulty, its causes and consequences and actions the State should carry out to address them. We posit that the political context and how the debate on end-of-life care was introduced into the public domain in Argentina explain the legal framework and ethical concerns related to a death with dignity. This chapter is based on a socio-historical study of the debates about end-of-life care in Argentina in the last 40 years. The research follows a qualitative design based on documentary sources and interviews with key informants. We analysed bills, laws, records of parliamentary sessions, jurisprudence of Argentine courts on the right to withhold or withdraw treatment and stories from national newspapers.

Death Studies in Argentina

Socio-anthropological studies of death and dying is an incipient research field in Argentina. The main studies in this area addressed the cultural experiences and rituals related to death and dying in different social groups, such as rural and indigenous communities.

Martínez (2010, 2013) examined death meanings in northern Argentina rural populations, analysing the leaky boundaries that separate the worlds of the living, the dead and their interactions, and suggested that, for this population, death was not a clear and static event but a dynamic process, an ontological gradual change. For these communities, death starts with anticipatory events and ends with the expulsion of the dead after rituals celebrated on the first-year anniversary of death of a person, when they gain a new ontological condition.

Also, in some festivities, the taboo is lifted and the dead return to inhabit the world of the living, establishing reciprocal relations. Through offerings to the dead, the living expect them to return good harvests, prosperity and good health. Ethnographic research in indigenous societies showed this porous limit between the realms of the dead and the living. For an aboriginal group of northern Argentina, death is a change in the ontological status which, however, does not separate the living and the dead (Wright 2008). Therefore, material and symbolical barriers must be established to avoid getting into contact with the dead, such as moving to another house, burning their clothes, and not using their name. Vilca (2009) examined the celebration of the dead and the importance of ancestors in the economic and sociocultural life of Andean communities, specifically in Jujuy province, and shows interactions and relations with the souls of the dead, who are known to influence the daily life of the living, bringing prosperity or misfortune.

In the same line of research, Bondar and Krautstofl (2015) analysed death and dying practices and beliefs in manifestations such as funerals, offerings, wakes and conceptions of apparitions in northeastern Argentina from a semiotic anthropology perspective. In his studies on funerals of children, where people bring presents and offerings, Bondar shows how these mortuary rituals play a role in helping families and communities confront early deaths.

Mourning rituals and experiences in urban groups have not been sufficiently studied by Argentine social sciences although most people live in large urban centres (only 10% of the population live in rural areas and 2.4% recognise themselves as indigenous). A few studies on this issue highlight recent changes in practices related to wakes and handling of bodies. There is a trend toward shorter wakes or burial with no wake, increased cremations, and the emergence of private cemeteries (Del Cueto and Piovani 2015; Carballo et al. 2006). These studies suggest a reinforcement of the taboo of death, the progressive disappearance of rituals to confront mourning and the privatization of these experiences.

Another important line of research on death and dying in Argentina studies political violence in recent years. Some studies have analysed the relationships between death, memory and politics, in relation to the forced disappearance practices during the last military dictatorship. Panizo (2016) examined death in the context of families of the disappeared, organisation of their families and Malvinas War veterans through a socio-symbolic perspective, focusing on the ritual role of the dead body or its absence. Regueiro (2010) studied the symbolic consequences of forced disappearance during the last military dictatorship, characterising it as a process in which families of the disappeared were politically persecuted.

Various studies have analysed the politicisation of bereavement with a focus on victims of institutional violence or citizen insecurity. When death is unjust for political reasons, the dead become victims that can help the living construct memories and claim justice. In contemporary Argentina, studies address these movements in the name of the dead, focusing on victims of state terrorism and violence (Jelin 2007; Pita 2010; Vecchioli 2005), citizen insecurity (Gayol and Kessler 2015, 2018) and victims of specific tragedies (Schillagi 2015; Zenobi 2014). These studies offer the key to understanding the power that death has recently acquired to become a topic of public debate in Argentina, motivated by the complaints by relatives and social organizations; private mourning became a political demand of recognition and atonement. These experiences of politicization are clearly part of collective mourning in Argentina.

Studies addressing the social organization of end-of-life care within medical contexts are recent in Argentina (in fact, almost 70 percent of deaths occur in healthcare facilities) and focus on certain types of healthcare services. With some exceptions (Epele 1995), most local research addresses end-of-life care in palliative care settings. Alonso (2012, 2013) has studied the experience and the medical organization of dying in palliative care services, examining end-of-life trajectories and the strategies used by patients and their families in their relationships with healthcare professionals. Luxardo (2011) studied identity, family, social and health redefinition processes experienced by patients near death and their networks. Radosta (2016) and Luxardo and Alvarado (2013) addressed a type of care emerging from Catholic Church initiatives, known as the Modern Hospice Movement, characterised as comprehensive care for people in the final stage of life. These studies address the tensions in end-of-life care in healthcare facilities, such as the continuing hiding of bad prognoses and the practical limits in discourses advocating for increased patients'

autonomy. However, this research studies only a small number of practices because, despite the development of palliative care in Argentina, its access is limited.

On the other hand, various studies have examined paediatric palliative care from an ethnographic perspective. Requena (2017) studied the everyday work of teachers of hospitalized children in palliative care, analysing the transformation of their pedagogical task into a type of care for children. Wainer (2015) studied how professionals constructed dignity and hope in end-of-life care for children with leukaemia and how corporality and children's subjectivities were integrated. Heredia (2017) analysed pain meaning and management by professionals in paediatric palliative care. Examining the participation of NGOs in paediatric oncology, Vindrola Padros (2009) and Brage and Padros (2017) analysed family migration on account of their children's treatment. Studies on death in children show how disruptive and unnatural these early deaths are for healthcare teams and families and also the difficult and unequal access of this population to health services.

These studies, even in their own thematic, regional and epistemological diversity, offer the key to identify the characteristics of death and dying in Argentina and introduce institutional, organizational, cultural and political aspects that take part in the process. The debate on death with dignity in Argentina has been a point of convergence for these aspects. In this chapter we focus on those debates and the ways in which end of life care and patient's rights were publicly discussed and addressed in the country.

The Emergence of "Death with Dignity" as a Public Problem in Argentina

The first efforts to regulate the rights of terminally-ill patients in Argentina date back to 1996. Until then, the withholding or withdrawing of treatment was covered by the law regulating medical practice, passed in 1967. An article in that law stated that health professionals had to respect the patients' wishes if the patients refused to receive treatment; also, a patient's written consent was required in the case of mutilating operations. However, Argentina lacked a clear legal framework to regulate medical life-ending decision-making.

Previous to 1996, several cases had been taken to the Argentine courts, mainly involving Jehovah's Witnesses patients, whose beliefs forbade them from receiving blood transfusions. In 1993, for the first time, the Supreme Court ruled that patients had a right to refuse a blood transfusion. However, none of these cases made much of an impact. The first case to receive media attention was a patient with diabetes who refused to have a leg amputated when it was affected by the disease. As the patient's decision endangered his life, the hospital requested court authorisation to perform the surgery. Based on jurisprudence, the court rejected the hospital's decision and granted the patient's claim, acknowledging, for the first time, the right to die with dignity. The patient died soon afterward, with the story making headlines

some months later. Although the case did not prompt a larger debate, it made possible the introduction of legislative initiatives and bills in 1996.

The purpose of these bills was to regulate the rights of terminally-ill patients, in particular the right to refuse life-sustaining treatment. They always referred to adult patients with full capacity to make autonomous decisions. The bills specified that it was compulsory to obtain a written informed consent form signed by the patient, treating physicians and witnesses, an external assessment by a medical board, a psychiatrist, an ethics committee and even a court order. Moreover, the bills included a provision specifically forbidding euthanasia, and it was always made clear that the bills intended to avoid therapeutic cruelty, even quoting the position of the Catholic Church on the matter, which had recently been published in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (Alonso 2014). Although the bills did not explicitly state the medical practices and treatments that could be rejected by patients, their advocates both in the Congress and in the media declared that this right did not include life-sustaining treatment such as a mechanical ventilator, artificial hydration or nutrition. Withholding or withdrawing these treatments was associated with euthanasia.

The media followed the progress of the legislative hearings and kept the topic on the public agenda during that year. Interestingly, neither patients nor their families were present in the parliamentary deliberation at any stage. Participants generally were representatives of medical associations, physicians with some training in bioethics, forensic medicine experts, representatives of the Catholic Church and judges. In addition, health professionals or institutions related to HIV/AIDS participated, as that condition was then in the limelight.

The bill gained support from different sectors (including timid support from the Catholic Church) and it was then discussed in Congress. However, during the parliamentary sessions, left-oriented legislators pointed out important problems in the bill. They mainly objected that the law would be unnecessary as the right to refuse treatment was already covered in the existing legislation and that such a new act could lead to the legalisation of euthanasia, especially in vulnerable populations.

While the motives of "death with dignity" revolved around avoiding therapeutic cruelty, the prevailing tone in the debate was not concerned with the dehumanising effect of technology, but on the vulnerability of dying patients in the healthcare system, a concern driven mostly by visibility of death in the context of HIV/AIDS. Therefore, the discussions aimed at securing patients' autonomy and to avoiding possible abusive practices by family members and healthcare institutions, which might try to reduce costs through the interruption of treatment, violating basic human rights. Finally, the Congress rejected the bill. During the following 10 years, none of the bills addressing the rights of terminally-ill patients reached the voting stage or had any significant impact.

The Enactment of "Death with Dignity" Law

In March 2011, a 19-year-old woman died of a degenerative illness in a public hospital in Buenos Aires. She had requested palliative sedation to relieve pain. Her request was denied by her physicians, who were not prepared to do so if they did not have a court order. The story was featured in a national newspaper, with the patient asking for an end to her suffering and for the country's president and legislators to pass the law of death with dignity. The girl's petition was heard by some members of the Congress who introduced the bill later that year. Some months later, the medical end-of-life decision-making generated national media attention and incited public discussion with the case of a baby in a vegetative state. The two-year old girl had suffered from oxygen deprivation during a cardiorespiratory arrest during birth. After a year with no improvements in the baby's health, and backed by rulings from ethics committees, her parents requested to withdraw the mechanical ventilation that was keeping her alive. However, her physicians refused to withdraw treatment without a court order; the baby's parents then turned to legislators and the media and asked for a law for cases like hers.

The extensive media coverage of this case led to attempts to legislate the issue; that same year, ten new bills were introduced by different political parties. In the public hearings, experts, including medical professionals, lawyers and bioethicists participated and, this time, patients' families were also invited. Consensus was reached on a bill that guaranteed the right of terminally-ill patients, or a family on their behalf, to refuse medical treatments that were disproportionate to the prospect of recovery, or that prolonged the dying process. The law also regulated advance healthcare directives or living wills, legal documents specifying decisions related to healthcare that might need to be made if the patient is incapacitated or unable to speak. The right to refuse artificial hydration and nutrition, considered by the Catholic Church as a basic care, had been explicitly listed among the practices that could be refused.

A distinctive feature of the law was the full recognition of the patient's autonomy. Unlike earlier bills, the new law granted no role to physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists or any other actor in the assessment of the validity of the patient's decisions. The idea that respecting patients' rights might undermine the physician's authority, as had been suggested during previous debates, was not brought up during the discussions of this bill. Moreover, the proposed changes to the bill did not affect the legal status of euthanasia and assisted suicide, which are criminal offences in Argentina. Euthanasia, a direct action intended to cause death, represented an ethical limit in the debates and was often used by legislators as a safeguard to advance on contentious issues, such as treatments that the Catholic church regarded as basic care. In that regard, the law states that all "therapies or medical or biological procedures" may legitimately be refused, including life-supporting therapies and more complex treatments, like mechanical ventilators, and less complex measures, such as artificial feeding and hydration.

The inclusion of these practices and the general tone of the debates, with references to the need to limit technology in favour of a natural death, reveal how the idea of "death with dignity" was constructed as a problem. The cases referred to during the legislative debate clearly involved prolonged disorders of consciousness (i.e. coma, vegetative or minimally-conscious state). The intensive—and now perceived as unjustified—use of technology to prolong the dying process served as a framework for the debates, with references to "therapeutic cruelty" and the dehumanising effect of technology in end-of-life care. However, the issue of the quality of care that terminally-ill patients received was not included. The concern about quality of care was introduced only by minority voices, who saw the debate as an opportunity to improve national programs of palliative care.

The legislative debate was covered by mass media, as was the health of the girl who prompted it. During the following months, other controversial cases were made public, contributing to families' petitions for the legislative change. The families of those patients, some of whom had died, participated as a group in the legislative process. The law was finally passed in 2012 by a wide and pluralistic majority in both houses of the Congress. Consensus was achieved thanks to the perception of legislators that such a law was really necessary. The wide media coverage of the cases and the active involvement of patients' families made clear who would benefit from the law. Legislating on this particular issue was seen as a test for the Congress' willingness to provide real answers to pressing issues in a political context of a progressive legislative agenda and expansion of civil rights.

Political and Social Conditions for the "Death with Dignity" Law

The law was passed mainly because of an unprecedented factor in Argentina–public claims made by patients and their families. The initial debates, while inspired by judicial cases, were promoted by legislators who had an interest in the issue, but those who were affected by end-of-life decision making were not involved. In recent years, however, the push for legislative change came first from individual patients and their families; then, as debates progressed, families gathered and formed advocacy groups that actively sought to keep the issue on the political agenda.

During parliamentary deliberations, patients' relatives became credible voices in the media and in congressional hearings. Their presence in media coverage helped them become known to the general public. The media coverage of controversial cases during the process put medical end-of-life decision making under public scrutiny for the first time in Argentina.

In Argentina, very few movements or groups had previously been created in relation to medical conditions and advocating for the rights of patients. However, there had been no group of terminally ill patients or advocacy groups promoting the right to die. Unlike what happens in English-speaking countries, in Argentina, as in most

Latin American countries, there were no organisations that protected the rights of terminally ill patients. There has been no political motivation in those cases that were brought to court and patients or their families have not judicialized medical end-of-life decision making.

The public demands made by patients and their families can be framed in the experiences of politicisation of bereavement promoted by relatives of victims of institutional violence or citizen insecurity. Those claims have allowed for a political solution to conflicts in end-of-life care, establishing withholding or withdrawing life-sustaining treatment as a matter of human rights. What is new in recent discussions is people's perception of medical end-of-life decision making and dignity in the context of human rights and the identification of the state as the guarantor of autonomy. As has been seen in the progress of debates, the discourse on patients' rights and the importance of autonomy in health is relatively novel in countries such as Argentina, where there has always been a patronising attitude and an informal trust in the physician's authority to make these types of decisions.

The cases that have generated debate have also affected the perception that legislators have of terminally ill patients. In 1996, the bills were mostly related to adult patients with a terminal illness, in full capacity, who decided to refuse a new medical treatment. They were patients in the last stages of a chronic or degenerative disease, such as cancer or HIV/AIDS—conditions that at that time were synonymous with death. The cases that have shaped the perception of terminally ill patients in more recent debates have been different; they include individuals in a vegetative state (not necessarily adults), deprived of the ability to make decisions, and suffering a prolonged death because of the use of life-extending medical technology.

The type of patient who refuses treatment and the therapies that can be withheld or withdrawn has also changed according to these perceptions. Although recently there has been a broad consensus on the need to include in legislation those individuals who are not legally competent, in the early debates there was resistance to including minors and the incompetent. In both cases, interventions and treatments that could be withheld or withdrawn varied according to what was considered euthanasia. In the first debates, the interruption of life-supporting treatments was considered a euthanistic practice; however, the 2012 law explicitly provided for withholding and/or withdrawal of these treatments, without engendering significant opposition. In both debates, however, euthanasia was seen as the moral limit of the practices accepted in the legislation, although the concept of what was considered euthanasia has been partly changed, showing that the limits of what is seen as morally acceptable or tolerable could somehow shift.

The influence of the Roman Catholic Church, which has always played an important role in the political life of the country, played a role in excluding more radical positions. In fact, the force of some of the claims by Catholic actors was significantly less than in parliamentary deliberations on issues that were more sensitive for the Church then, such as same-sex marriage, sex education, and debates on abortion. The clear exclusion of topics such as euthanasia and assisted suicide allows for the public discussion of the rights of terminally ill patients. The attitude of the Roman Catholic Church was similar in both debates: cautious support for the bills,

as long as they aimed to reduce cruel treatment in the last stages of life and continued to ban euthanasia. These values were consonant with the official doctrine on the subject. The church's caveats were mostly concerned with the risk of a slippery slope, expressed as a fear that the supposed respect for personal integrity might be used to violate the rights of vulnerable individuals, or that the initiatives would mean a move towards legalizing euthanasia.

During the recent debates that led to passing the "death with dignity" law, the Roman Catholic Church was opposed to the authorization to withhold life-supporting treatments considered as ordinary means (such as artificial hydration and nutrition), arguing that it would be a passive form of euthanasia. The claim was ignored by legislators, but the Church's opposition was moderate.

The debate in Argentina had a low level of conflict, compared to recent confrontations over the legalization of abortion or the reactions to similar cases in other countries. One possible explanation is that society was sympathetic to the families of terminally ill patients, who demanded a dignified death. In fact, media coverage of these cases was supportive of the families' decisions and public opinion polls showed extensive acceptance of the law by the population. Also, in the midst of the debates, the family of a girl who had become a symbol of the dignified death campaign revealed that it had received the support of the head of the Catholic Church in Argentina, who later became Pope Francis. The fact that the public demands had been championed by mothers, who emphasized their maternal identities supporting their claims, also found echo in the recent history of maternal activism in the country (from the Madres de Plaza de Mayo to mothers of victims of urban crime).

Finally, the rejection of the bill in 1996 and the broad consensus on the need to pass the law in 2012 could be understood in the political contexts at each moment. The first parliamentary debate took place during President Carlos Menem's second administration (1995–1999). President Menem followed the recommendations of international lending agencies of the Washington Consensus and performed neoliberal economic and social reforms. In line with these policies and a political discourse in favour of reducing state intervention, the health care system was reformed and decentralized. Along with social services deregulation and an unemployment rate increase, the reforms in the health care system had a negative effect on health care coverage (Lloyd-Sherlock, 2005). In such a context, the first initiatives on end-of-life care were interpreted by some legislators not as an expansion of civil rights but as the further deprivation of already vulnerable people; supporting the bills meant endorsing the non-intervention of the state in health care. On the other hand, the "death with dignity" law was passed during the second administration of President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2011–2015), in a different political context in terms of economic and social policies as well as the role of the state in protecting and extending rights. The law can be understood specifically within a legislative agenda that supported personal autonomy in decisions on a person's own body, especially in terms of sexual and reproductive rights. Both contexts influenced legislators' and laypersons' perceptions of terminally ill patients—from potential victims of physicians and health institutions to autonomous persons.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have analysed the debates on patients' rights at the end of life in Argentina. Based on documentary sources, we have described the debates on "death with dignity" and examined changes in the conceptualization of autonomy and the interventions that were seen as legitimately rejected over time; we also described how the issue was introduced in the public agendas and the political context of the debates.

Medical end-of-life care involves personal dignity and individual freedom. The changes in the debates show how the values of personal autonomy and patients' interests have come to play a central role in medical contexts. The social and political conditions under which the issue was introduced shaped the frameworks in which end-of-life care was constructed as a problem. As seen in the sociology of public problems, the way an issue is defined affects the response. The ways in which "death with dignity" reached the public domain in Argentina shaped the very definitions of this notion. To "die with dignity" did not always mean the same thing. "Death with dignity" must be understood as a dynamic concept—a stage in which moral, scientific, religious, and political discourses construct the socially acceptable ways of dying.

References

Alonso, J. P. (2012). Contornos negociados del buen morir: la toma de decisiones médicas en el final de la vida. *Revista Interface – Comunicação, Saúde, Educação, 16*(40), 191–203.

Alonso, J. P. (2013). Cuidados paliativos: entre la humanización y la medicalización del final de la vida. *Revista Ciência & Saúde Coletiva, 18*(9), 2541–2548.

Alonso, J. P. (2014). De medios ordinarios y extraordinarios. La Iglesia Católica y los debates sobre la "muerte digna" en Argentina. *Religião e Sociedade, 34*(1), 122–145.

Bondar, C. I., & Krautstofl, E. M. (2015). *Lecturas antropo-semióticas sobre la muerte y el morir desde Latinoamérica*. Posadas: Editorial Universitaria/Universidad Nacional de Misiones.

Brage, E., & Vindrola Padros, C. (2017). An ethnographic exploration of the delivery of psychosocial care to children with cancer in Argentina. *European Journal of Oncology Nursing, 29*, 91–97.

Carballo, C. T., Batalla, M. R., & Lorea, N. A. (2006). Ciudad, segregación y cementerios: análisis de los cambios en los patrones históricos de localización (Argentina). *Scripta Nova: revista electrónica de geografía y ciencias sociales, 10(218)*, 42–59.

Del Cueto, C., & Piovani, J. I. (2015). El mercado de la muerte: cementerios, memoriales y jardinez de paz en Buenos Aires. In S. Gayol & G. Kessler (Eds.), *Muerte, política y sociedad en la Argentina* (pp. 301–326). Buenos Aires: Edhasa.

Dworkin, R. (1993). *Life's dominion*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Epele, M. (1995). Una aproximación antropológica a la enfermedad terminal. In M. Álvarez & V. Barreda (Eds.), *Cultura, salud y enfermedad. Temas en antropología médica* (pp. 157–161). Buenos Aires: INAyPL.

Gayol, S., & Kessler, G. (Eds.). (2015). *Muerte, política y sociedad en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Edhasa.

Gayol, S., & Kessler, G. (2018). *Muertes que importan. Una mirada sociohistórica sobre los casos que marcaron la argentina reciente*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI.

Heredia, C. (2017). *Sentir dolor. Recorridos, búsquedas y terapias en los Cuidados Paliativos Pediátricos.* Unpublished master's thesis, IDES/IDAES, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Hillyard, D., & Dombrink, J. (2001). *Dying right: The death with dignity movement*. New York: Routledge.

Jelin, E. (2007). Víctimas, familiares y ciudadanos/as: las luchas por la legitimidad de la palabra. *Cadernos Pagú, 29*, 37–60.

Lloyd-Sherlock, P. (2005). Health sector reform in Argentina: A cautionary tale. *Social Science & Medicine, 60*(8), 1893–1903.

Luxardo, N. (2011). *Morir en casa. El cuidado en el hogar en el final de la vida*. Buenos Aires: Biblos.

Luxardo, N., & Alvarado, C. (2013). Desafíos de intervención en el final de la vida: el cuidado hospice. In C. Krmpotic, M. Mitjavila, & M. Saizar (Eds.), *(Sub) culturas profesionales. Poder y prácticas en salud* (pp. 157–170). Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila.

Martínez, B. (2010). Rituales de la muerte en el sector sur de los Valles Calchaquíes. In C. Hidalgo (Ed.), *Etnografías de la muerte. Rituales, desapariciones, VIH/SIDA y resignificación de la vida* (pp. 87–105). Buenos Aires: CLACSO/CICCUS.

Martínez, B. (2013). Devenir histórico y juridicidad emergente: espacialidad simbólica en Santa María (Argentina). *Revista Austral de Ciencias Sociales, 25*, 5–23.

McInerney, F. (2000). "Request death": A new social movement. *Social Science & Medicine, 50*, 137–154.

Panizo, L. (2016). Among bodies: Reflections on ethnographic work and the repercussions of exhumations and identifications of the disappeared of the last military dictatorship in Argentina. *Human Remains and Violence, 2*, 21–38.

Pita, M. V. (2010). *Formas de morir y formas de vivir. El activismo contra la violencia policial*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Puerto.

Radosta, D. I. (2016). Muerte social y terminalidad terapéutica en el marco del moderno movimiento *hospice*. *Mitológicas, 31*, 41–53.

Regueiro, S. (2010). Familia y desaparición. Implicancias simbólicas de la desaparición en la familia. In Hidalgo, C. (Comp.). *Etnografías de la muerte. Rituales, desapariciones, VIH/SIDA y resignificación de la vida* (pp. 43–80). Buenos Aires: CLACSO/CICCUS.

Requena, M. L. (2017). *Una escuela hospitalaria. Etnografía sobre los cuidados de niños gravemente enfermos*. Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila.

Richards, N. (2012). The fight-to-die: Older people and death activism. *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life, 7*(1), 7–32.

Richards, N. (2014). The death of right-to-die campaigners. *Anthropology Today, 30*(3), 14–17.

Richards, N. (2015). Dying to go to court: demanding a legal remedy to end of life. In Harper, Ian et al. (Cords.) *The clinic and the court. Law, medicine and anthropology* (pp. 214–238). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rothman, D. (1991). *Strangers at the bedside: A history of how law and bioethics transformed medical decision making*. New York: Basic Books.

Schillagi, C. (2015). La muerte como causa pública. Denuncia y construcción de legitimidad en dos casos paradigmáticos. In S. Gayol & G. Kessler (Eds.), *Muerte, política y sociedad en la Argentina* (pp. 156–177). Buenos Aires: Edhasa.

Vecchioli, V. (2005). La nación como familia. Metáforas políticas del movimiento argentino de derechos humanos. In S. Frederic & G. Soprano (Eds.), *Cultura y política en etnografías sobre la Argentina* (pp. 241–270). Buenos Aires: Ediciones UNQUI.

Vilca, M. (2009). Los ojos cerrados a la espera del sol maduro. La celebración de las almas en Llamerías, Puna de Jujuy. *Estudios de Filosofía Práctica e Historia de las Ideas, 11*(1), 45–51.

Vindrola Padros, C. (2009). *The participation of NGOs in healthcare: The case of pediatric cancer treatment in Argentina*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of South Florida, United States.

Wainer, R. (2015) *Permeable bodies: children, cancer, and biomedicine in Argentina*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia, Canada.
Weyers, H. (2006). Explaining the emergence of euthanasia law in the Netherlands: How the sociology of law can help the sociology of bioethics. *Sociology of Health & Illness, 28*(6), 802–816.
Wright, P. (2008). *Ser-en-el-sueño. Crónicas de historia y vida toba*. Buenos Aires: Biblos.
Zenobi, D. (2014). *Familia, política y emociones. Las víctimas de Cromañón entre el movimiento y el Estado*. Buenos Aires: Antropofagia.

Superstar-Saints and Wandering Souls: The Cemetery as a Cultural Hotspot in Latin American Cities

Christien Klaufus

Abstract This chapter engages with the meanings of death and the dead through a focus on urban cemetery cults, in which rural migrant populations in Latin American cities come to grips with a legacy of displacement and violence. The chapter explores two parallel cults: the veneration of folk saints and the communication with anonymous or forgotten dead, whose "restless souls" are deemed to be wandering in purgatory. The chapter claims, first, that the cults need to be understood as a reproduction of traditional rural beliefs within an urban context; and second, that the cults are a form of memory politics enacted by vulnerable populations dealing with disruptive violent pasts and forced displacements. While many capital cities in Latin America have developed formal places for the commemoration of violent episodes, everyday memorialization practices in cemeteries offer an alternative reading of those pasts, and of the position of known and unknown deadly victims therein. The two concurring explanations, I posit, support the idea that designated cemeteries are to be seen as urban cultural hotspots. The geographical focus of this essay is on Bogotá and Lima, two metropolises of comparable history and size. The sanctification and veneration cults in these cities testify in complementary ways to the relevance of the cemetery as a cultural hotspot for the urban masses. The richness and diversity of the stories, cults and practices centering on the dead body and its on-living soul is a valuable yet undervalued resource in contemporary urban life.

Keywords Cemetery · Veneration cult · Disruptive past · Urban cultural hotspot · Latin America

C. Klaufus (✉)
Senior Lecturer/Researcher in Human Geography and Urban Studies, Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
e-mail: c.j.klaufus@cedla.nl

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_17

Imagine a stroll in the monumental Cementerio Central in the heart of megacity Bogotá, Colombia, on a Monday. Entering through the principal gate, the first tomb one passes in the central avenue is a child's tomb covered in flowers. On this day of the week, several families approach the tomb to bring flowers and to touch and polish the marble Virgin Mary on top of the grave, known as La Piedad. Further down the lane on the right hand side, dozens of pilgrims await their turn to approach a copper statue resembling Rodin's Thinker. It represents German-born entrepreneur Leo Kopp, who was buried there in 1927. Once devotees get their turn, they whisper in the polished copper ear of the statue to ask a favor; Kopp's spirit is believed to empower the neediest people. The success of the requests is evidenced in piles of gifts and gratitude messages that function as a catalyst for more visitors. While the pilgrimages to La Piedad and Kopp's tomb are highly visible, less visible homages to insignificant graves are part of the same circuit. The deteriorated graves are the homes of Bogotá's nameless and forgotten dead, whose souls are said to swarm in purgatory. Sometimes you can see people knock on a headstone to invoke such a spirit. To be sure, most visitors are neither related to the prestigious families buried there nor to the forgotten souls. Despite the cemetery's elite origins, the graves are most visited by the poor and marginalized. These are the people who settled in Bogotá from the 1950s onward, fleeing the war-torn Colombian countryside. For them, the cemetery is a place of refuge and hope, a place where each visit marks the possibility of a miracle.

This chapter engages with the meanings of death and the dead through a focus on urban cemetery cults, in which rural migrant populations in Latin American cities come to grips with a legacy of displacement and violence. The vignette above describes two parallel cultural circuits: one for the veneration of dead public figures who are sanctified and transformed into folk saints, and another for the anonymous or forgotten dead, whose "restless souls" are deemed to be wandering in purgatory. Both types of death cult are physically and visibly anchored to cemeteries as crucial elements of everyday life. Even though some of these cults have been created relatively recently, the veneration practices are produced as part of transcendent cultural traditions and, I posit, of rural-urban migration histories, often within a larger context of violence. I propose to understand the cemeteries that accommodate these enactments as cultural hotspots, to stress their relevance for contemporary city life.

In the following text, these claims are substantiated through the exploration of cemetery veneration cults along two dimensions. The first dimension understands veneration as a reproduction of traditional rural beliefs within an urban context. I assess cemetery cults using theories about Amerindian ontological visions and practices to explain the relation between living humans and deceased persons' spirits or souls. Massive rural-urban migration, which in Latin America was triggered by changing rural economies but in many cases also by violent conflict, form the context in which I position this heritage. The pilgrimages to tombs and graves demonstrate a deep-rooted and widespread belief in reciprocal relations between devotees and the souls of saints and forgotten dead whose bodies are buried in the cemetery. The devotees worship or materially donate to saints and spirits expecting some kind of recompense, be it in the form of health, protection from harm, financial success

or a livelihood (Hawley 1987; Kosansky 2002). Scholars have noted that veneration cults have gained more prominence over the past decade, partly due to the function these cults have for disadvantaged groups in the highly unequal cities of Latin America (Álvarez et al. 2013; Acosta Aguirre 2013; Lazo 2012; O'Neill 2012; Reyes-Cortez 2012; Vignolo 2013). These groups are often first, second or third generation rural migrants who re-produce traditional knowledge in the context of contemporary urban livelihoods (Abercrombie 1998; Ouweneel 2019).

This links to the second dimension of my analysis, in which veneration cults are explored as memory politics to deal with disruptive violent pasts. Memory politics clearly speak to Latin America's histories of violent conflict and forced displacement, of which rapidly grown metropoles such as Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Guatemala City and Lima are the outcome. While many capital cities have developed formal places for the commemoration of violence—notably Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Lima and Santiago de Chile—everyday memorialization practices offer alternative readings of those pasts and of the position of known and unknown deadly victims therein (Castro Roldán and García 2015; Garrard-Burnett 2015; González Puccetti 2009; Losonczy 2001). The two concurring explanations support the idea that designated cemeteries, in which pilgrimages take place are to be seen as urban cultural hotspots—a concept that I will set out to discuss first. The geographical focus of this essay is on Bogotá and Lima, two Latin American metropolises of comparable history and size, where saints and spirits have become part of the deathscapes for low-income populations. The performances and materializations of sanctification and veneration cults in these cities testify in complementary ways to their relevance for the contemporary city in Latin America. My exploration draws from ethnographic research conducted in Bogotá and Lima between 2014 and 2017 by my research group,[1] and on secondary literature.

Cemeteries as Cultural Hotspots

The ways in which cemeteries and spaces of memorialization in Latin America's large and cramped cities are designed to function are changing. Many newer cemeteries and memory parks are private spaces that were created over the last two decades by public-private partnerships or private developers to serve the urban middle class. Many older municipal cemeteries, in turn, traditionally serve low-income groups. These cemeteries face financial difficulties while also suffering from political disinterest (Klaufus 2014, 2016b, 2017a, b, 2018). Latin America is the most urbanized region of the developing world (UN-DESA 2014; UN-Habitat 2012). Between the 1950s and 1990s most capital cities transformed from provincial towns

[1] My research group Deathscapes in Latin American Metropolises included Camilo Martínez in Bogotá in 2015 (research assistant); Werner Jungbluth in Lima in 2016 (postgraduate); Martina Morbidini in Lima in 2016 and 2017 (postgraduate); Roel Roscam Abbing in Lima in 2016 (photographer); Letty Reimerink in Buenos Aires in 2016 (postgraduate); Erwin Jansen in Lima in 2017(research intern).

into megacities within just a few decades, with highly unequal socio-spatial outcomes (Gilbert 1996; Hoffman and Centeno 2003). These were the decades in which Latin American societies dealt with changing rural economies and macroeconomic hardship paired with episodes of violent conflict that fueled a massive displacement of rural people to cities. The rural populations moving to the city introduced cultural practices and traditions that differed substantially from the cultural norms and values of the established urban elites. New configurations of mortuary beliefs and practices changed the cultural landscapes of death and the dead, of disposal and memorialization—conceptualized as deathscapes (Kong 1999; Maddrell and Sidaway 2010)—in Latin American cities. While the cultural and economic elites developed gated and privately governed parkland cemeteries (Klaufus 2016a), low-income groups relied on the facilities offered by the municipal and parochial cemeteries, not just for burials but also for religious and social practices.

Cemeteries in Latin American cities serve more than just a dead disposal function. In the accommodation of peoples' highly diverse practices and beliefs, the public cemeteries are to be seen as *cultural hotspots*. The hotspot notion is adopted from environmental and biodiversity research, in which the concept "diversity hotspot" was coined in the 1980s to indicate a relatively small and threatened area that contains an exceptional richness of endemic or rare species (Reid 1998). Adapting the concept to be used in an urban cultural context—in which I understand culture as explicitly *not* determined by any biological human feature—I conceptualize the hotspot as a relatively small urban area with a high density of culturally rich and socially valuable features. This is a place where people express their beliefs in practices that are crucial to everyday life, while the area is threatened by enclosure. Pressures from urban land markets and, more generally, from a capitalist logic of the urban economy threaten precisely these urban areas where low-income and vulnerable populations bury the dead and commemorate the souls and spirits. These deathscapes are the urban cultural hotspots I claim to be valuable for today's cities more than usually acknowledged in scholarship and policy practices.

Deathscapes in Bogotá and Lima

Bogotá and Lima illustrate in complementary ways how certain cemeteries became cultural hotspots. The above vignette about the Cementerio Central takes us to Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia. Bogotá's cemeteries testify in visible and invisible ways about Colombia's different violent episodes between 1948 and 2016. In 1948, an incident known as the *Bogotazo* was the onset of larger mayhem that lasted until the signing of the Peace Accord in 2016. On 9 April 1948 the popular liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was murdered in cold blood in the streets of Bogotá. His murder immediately fueled local uprisings and violent protests, leaving parts of Bogotá's inner city completely destroyed within a day. From then on Colombia passed through ten violent years of internal conflict known as *La Violencia* followed by decades of guerilla warfare and later, the infamous drug

wars. Within these decades Bogotá grew from a relatively quiet city with approximately 650,000 inhabitants to a megacity of almost nine million (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá 2010, 2018). Most of the newcomers to the city had fled the enduring violence in the countryside. Thousands of displaced settled in the dilapidated and destroyed historical inner city, parts of which soon turned into no-go areas rife with petty thieves, waste pickers, drug addicts and heavily armed wholesale drug traders. Subsequent waves of rural migration were directed towards the cheap waste lands south of the built-up area, in a part of the metropole now known as Ciudad Bolívar (Zeiderman 2016).

Bogotá's oligarchy, in contrast, had moved up north decades earlier where they settled in the safe and well serviced areas above the 100th street (Dávila 2016). There they constructed gated communities and in similar fashion, gated private parkland cemeteries; the lush and spacious Garden Cities for the privileged dead. Apart from a few smaller parochial Roman Catholic cemeteries, the city center and southern parts were serviced by three cramped public cemeteries: one in central-north Chapinero built in 1918 for Spanish flu victims. The second one, Cementerio Central, founded in 1836 as Bogotá's first extra-urban cemetery is now fully enclosed by dilapidated low-income neighborhoods. And the third one, built in the 1940s, in the southern-central low-income zone Matatigres. With the elites no longer living in the city center, these cemeteries service low- and middle-income clients. As a result, Bogotá's socio-spatial pattern is mirrored in the metropolitan deathscape.

In the 1990s, the three public cemeteries reached their limits when death tolls soared in this "number one murder capital in the world". A fourth municipal cemetery opened its doors in 2006 in an attempt to resolve the disposal capacity problems. Cemetery Serafín was explicitly designed to cater to the poor of Ciudad Bolívar. But its history was also connected to that of Cementerio Central and the *Bogotazo* uprisings because Serafin was meant to accommodate human remains from Cementerio Central. The relocation of these remains took place in the late 1990s, when mayors Peñalosa and Mockus successively planned a monumental park and a National Reconciliation Center on the "poor-people's graves" in Cementerio Central. The Central cemetery consisted of three sectors, with the walled cemetery founded by and for Colombia's elite in 1836 (later expanded to include middle-class graves) as the most prestigious part. Next to the elite sector, the cemetery contained a field with vertical columbaria housing cheap burial niches. A third, separate terrain also contained poor people's graves, but also a mass grave with thousands of anonymous victims from the *Bogotazo* (Vignolo 2013). When the mayors decided to transform the two pauper sections into public spaces, the existing graves had to be emptied. Cemetery Serafín was designed to archive these remains (Klaufus 2016a). Moreover, with the three existing municipal cemeteries used to the limits and dead numbers soaring, Serafín was designed to create a capacity buffer for the future. Against this backdrop, in which local authorities grappled with the logistics of affordable dead disposal, an alternative landscape of beliefs and memorialization came into existence in which pilgrimages and venerations challenge the formal class-based division between cemetery spaces for the rich and the poor.

A few 1000 km down south, Peru's capital city Lima passed through a similar history with a different outcome. As in Bogotá, Lima expanded rapidly between the 1950s and 1990s (Matos Mar 2004). And similar to Bogotá, many incoming migrants fled the countryside in the 1980s when the guerilla movement Shining Path, the self-defense units called Peasant Rounds (Rondas Campesinas) and the Peruvian state were involved in a bloody war that lasted until the turn of the century. During these decades Lima transformed from a traditional city with approximately 700,000 inhabitants in the 1950s to an extensive metropole housing over nine million people (INEI 1996; Protzel 2011). Yet different from its Colombian counterpart, we hardly know how cemeteries developed in response to the population increase. Dozens of informal or illegal (clandestine) cemeteries were created by rural migrants themselves as part of a do-it-yourself solution for services not provided otherwise, in the proximity of informal settlements. Yet these histories were never documented.

In central Lima, the first *extra urbem* cemetery Presbítero Maestro, modeled after the Parisian Père Lachaise cemetery, was founded in 1808. Offering spaces for the dead outside the church the cemetery corresponded to spreading Enlightenment ideas about the sanitary risks of death (Ariès 1976; Silverman 2002). Although the Presbítero Maestro was supposed to serve people of different ranks and files equally, it "immediately became an important element in the topography of power and meaning in late Colonial Lima" (Silverman 2002, p. 168). After independence and during the twentieth century, the urban landscape of the dead became increasingly fragmented and segregated. Today, as in Bogotá, the upper middle-class confines its dead to one of the many large and privately owned parkland cemeteries situated close to suburban gated communities. The lower and lower-middle classes, in turn, are confined to cheap municipal or informal cemeteries. Authorities estimate that metropolitan Lima (including Callao) has approximately 135 cemeteries, of which at least 16 clandestine ones have been counted (DIGESA 2007). In reality, many more informal cemeteries are maintained out of sight of the authorities. These are the places of burial and memorialization where thousands of Limeños with Andean roots reproduce their traditional ways of thinking about death and the dead in an urban context.

Lima's most emblematic self-created deathscape is cemetery Virgen de Lourdes in the municipal district of Villa María del Triunfo in southern Lima. This cemetery of over 60 hectares houses the remains of at least 120,000 persons, but realistic figures are lacking as there is no complete registration system (Villanueva et al. 2009, p. 12). [By way of comparison: on the 29 hectares of the dense inner-city cemetery El Ángel an estimated 500.000 persons are buried, most of them in vertical columbaria (Sociedad de Beneficencia de Lima Metropolitana)]. As far as local dwellers recall, the cemetery was originally created in the 1950s on an empty terrain (now a sports field), when the first residents settled here (MVMT 2016). In need of a place to bury dead residents, they clandestinely converted the terrain into a graveyard. In the early 1960s the municipality claimed control over what formally was

state territory. In the 1970s the authorities exhumed and transferred all human remains to an adjacent terrain, which became the current municipal cemetery. While death and burial registers are formally governed by District authorities and kept in municipal offices, the cemetery has remained largely uncontrolled in its everyday uses. The cemetery has an incomprehensible order only known to insiders. People who need to bury someone are used to selecting the plot of their choice. They are accustomed to building a grave and organize the transportation of the body, the funeral service, and the burial act by themselves in accordance with their traditions and finances (and regardless of the formal regulations).

This long-standing DIY practice has resulted in the Virgen de Lourdes cemetery (and for that matter, in all other informal cemeteries in Lima) in thousands of makeshift graves—some of them too shallow to speak of proper burial—spread out over several hills (Fig. 1). In 2015 the municipality of district Villa María del Triunfo published a decree that sought to regularize three things: the physical layout of graves, the gaps in grave ownership registers, and the sanitary monitoring of mortuary practices. So far, the census obligation has not had much effect. In fact, Virgen de Lourdes has gained local, national and international fame for being chaotic and "authentic". The media call this place the largest "indigenous" cemetery of Lima. Whereas clients and visitors appreciate the cemetery for its ritual richness, the municipality explores possibilities to privatize or sell parts of the cemetery—a decision that might threaten its social function.

Fig. 1 Virgen de Lourdes cemetery. (Photo Roel Roscam Abbing)

Superstar-Saints

In Latin American traditional belief, death is understood as a trajectory that connects ancestral times to current and future times through encounters of living humans with the spirits and souls of deceased humans (Abercrombie 1998; Allen 2002). The essence of this worldview is a flexible relation between the body and the soul as is apparent in the belief system still found for example in the Andean highlands. "The Andean worldview does not accommodate the Western dualism of body and soul; for Andeans, all matter is in some sense alive, and conversely, all life has a material base" (Allen 2002, p. 44). Some Amerindian groups from the Andes believe that each body has three souls that float in and out of the body until a person is completely socialized (Ossio 1999). This widespread belief, also found among the Maya in Guatemala and Mexico, acknowledges the possibility that man can communicate with the souls in the hereafter. In other words: the souls and spirits of the dead are seen as living agents and mediators, with whom the devotee enters in an active and reciprocal relationship as a kind of extended family (Graziano 2007; Hawley 1987).

In Latin American cemeteries, people can visit a cemetery in different ways and for different reasons. Most people will visit the graves of relatives that passed away. But an increasing group of urbanites also visits the tombs of people considered to be saints, and they also visit the graves of the unknown and forgotten dead. In all these situations, people firmly believe they can communicate with the dead in the hereafter. Notwithstanding the differences between traditional Amerindian beliefs and Christianity, the Roman Catholic notion of purgatory as a threshold between earth and heaven has been integrated into traditional beliefs about the hereafter. In addition to communicating, people believe they can negotiate their own destiny on earth as the soul in purgatory seeks an effort that might lift them from the in-between into heaven (Graziano 2007; Ouweneel 2019). The dead person as a living agent thus appears in three forms: deceased from one's own close circle, famous-figures-turned-folk-saints, and unknown dead regarded as powerful spirits.

These last two categories are a special kind of dead people in cities, because beyond "their willingness or capacity to intercede on behalf of their communities, [t]hey perform on a grand scale the role that a dead relative performs for the family" (Graziano 2007, p. 10). Folk saints and wandering souls are influential if only for their mythical qualities. "Within each religion, a powerful body of tradition emphasizes not codes but stories, not precepts but personalities, not lectures but lives" (Hawley 1987, xi). Different from the officially recognized saints in formal religions, folk saints are in essence nothing more than "deceased people, some of entirely constructed identity, who are widely regarded as miraculous and receive the devotion of a substantial cult, but who are not canonized or officially recognized" (Graziano 2007, vii). The relevance of such easily accessible saints and spirits and the importance of their life stories for the masses stems from their function as alternative role models and mediators. Besides, their miracles and aid generate a sense of fellowship in the loosely connected devotee community (Graziano 2007; Hawley

1987). Socially speaking, the attractiveness to believing in supernatural agents with the capacity to intervene in the here and now becomes greater for those groups for whom control over their life courses is small. High levels of what Giddens (1991) calls a lack of ontological security direct vulnerable groups to an inclined attachment to a devotee fellowship and to otherworld's forces and agents. Saints and powerful souls are such agents. Communication with the saints and souls is highly accessible because the realm of the hereafter in which they remain cannot be enclosed. Even though religious gatekeepers on earth, such as priests, have the power to enclose access to the formally recognized routes to Heaven, the informal routes that connect humans to folk saints and spirits, wherever they remain, are not gated communities. In fact, getting in touch with saints and spirits might be one of the few real urban commons left in a region where urban public resources are increasingly enclosed (Harvey 2012; Huron 2015) [Fig. 2].

This is certainly true in Bogotá and Lima (Dávila 2016; Gandolfo 2009; Zeiderman 2016). In these metropoles, high levels of social inequality paired with high perceptions of insecurity and ongoing episodes of political instability sustain levels of ontological insecurity in large parts of the population. If socioeconomic strata 1 and 2 in Bogotá can be taken as indicators of a population that deals with daily struggles, over three quarters of the Bogotanos have difficulties in ensuring long-term livelihood security (Dávila 2016, p. 182 n.1). [In Bogotá people are categorized on the basis of the real estate value of their homes ranging from 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest). These strata are used in social policies]. Although in Lima the official poverty rate of 13.3 percent might be relatively low (INEI 2018), over 70% of the

Fig. 2 Notes with written requests to a folk saint in Lima. (Photo Christien Klaufus)

population falls within the lowest socioeconomic levels A, B and C. These levels similarly lack a secure livelihood (APEIM 2017). [In Lima people are categorized from A (highest) to E (lowest) on the basis of household income]. In addition to peoples' everyday struggles, general levels of trust are low in both cities, partly as a consequence of high urban crime levels and in a longer perspective also as an outcome of the armed Colombian and Peruvian conflicts (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá 2002; Lima Cómo Vamos 2017). The combination of perceived insecurity and social inequality has resulted in fragmented urban societies, in which low-income and marginalized groups rely for mutual support on the social relations they develop within solidarity groups, or on social relations with agents from alternative realms: those who inhabit the hereafter. This is especially true for the most vulnerable groups of people stigmatized for being morally deviant, such as people from the LGBT community, sex workers, and convicted criminals. In Lima, these groups venerate folk saint Sarita Colonia, a 26 year old woman buried in 1940 in Callao (part of metropolitan Lima) who became a folk saint in the 1970s (Graziano 2007). In Bogotá, folk saints like the famous prostitute Salomé and the already mentioned German brewer Leo Kopp, both buried in Cementerio Central, equally attract devotees among the poor, trans-genders and petty criminals, all hoping to find work or a fortune (Calvo Isaza 1998; Peláez 2001; González Puccetti 2009; Losonczy 2001) [Fig. 3]. These saints are regarded as exemplary figures, as Superstars even. Their mystified life stories include elements of altruism and resistance against the status quo. In short, their mythical biographies testify of social courage and extreme humanity.

Fig. 3 Waiting in line in front of the tomb of Leo Kopp, Bogotá. (Photo Christien Klaufus)

Sarita Colonia, Metropolitan Lima

The girl Sarita Colonia exemplifies someone from the first generation of rural-urban migrants in Lima. Born in Huaraz in 1914 in a poor family, she moved to the capital city with her parents in the early 1920s. After a short return to Huaraz, she moved there again in the 1930s to work as a maid and a nanny. As a girl she was said to be altruistic and dedicated to charity. Although she died in 1940 at age 26 of an overdose of castor oil, presumably taken to resist malaria, myths about her life mention a much more violent ending involving the sudden fall off a cliff into the ocean to escape a group of violent and rapist military officers (Graziano 2007). Sarita was buried in a cheap mass grave in the Baquíjano cemetery in Callao, where a cross with her name was placed. Since this was the only identifiable spot near the mass grave, it coincidentally became the place where other visitors put flowers dedicated to their loved ones' remains in the mass grave. This was the onset of a small-scale cult, in which the myth stressed Sarita's misfortune, her chastity and charity. When massive rural-urban migration flows entered Lima in the 1960s and 1970s, and later during the gruesome internal conflict in the 1980s, the popularity of Sarita Colonia exploded (Graziano 2007). She became the unofficial Superstar-Saint of the new Limeños of rural descent.

More specifically, she became the patron saint of thieves and prisoners. Rumor has it that some criminals even went to make requests at Sarita's shrine before committing a crime, only to thank her afterwards for the successful endeavor. The police, in turn, tried to capture devotee criminals at the shrine. Not coincidentally, Callao's prison is named after her. At the height of the popularity of the Sarita cult in the late 1970s, some 2000 visitors per day were said to visit her shrine (Graziano 2007, 147). Among them were an exceptionally high number of bus and taxi drivers, who also regarded her as their patroness as she was believed to prevent sudden death due to her own alleged fall from the cliff. In fact, each category of devotees added elements of their own life story to the Sarita Colonia myth, some stressing her abuse by Peruvian elites, others mentioning the theft accusations she faced, or the (attempted) rape either by her employer or by uniformed state officials. This way, during decades of massive in-migration Sarita Colonia became the Superstar-Saint whose shrine was a place of refuge and hope for poor and of marginalized groups, among whom were transvestites, informal workers and criminals. With the consolidation of Lima's low-income settlements, her superstar status gradually started to wane.

The explanation for the tremendous popularity of the Sarita Colonia myth consists of three main elements that sustain my claims that veneration reproduces traditional rural beliefs within an urban context, and that these traditional reinventions not only to come to grips with harsh urban realities in the present, but also with disruptive violent pasts. First, Sarita was a young migrant from the rural highlands, which meant she was identified as a *mestiza* or *chola* (urbanite of Amerindian decent) like millions of other newcomers to Lima (Matos Mar 2004). Second, she sacrificed her labor power to help her family and others in need, which makes her a virtuous person. Third, she died a tragic death (castor oil or malaria), which in its

mythical version included the defense of her virginity against violent state officials—a clear metaphor of the Latin American unequal and *machista* society rife with male-dominated violence (cf. Peláez 2001). The metaphor also refers to a Peru that attempts to come to grips with the internal war of the 1980s and 1990s. The formal dismissal of her miracles by the Catholic Church only added to her status. Together with the alleged abuse by the military these elements of the myth symbolize a generally abusive role of Peruvian national institutions. Her young age, her female and *chola* identity, and her low-schooled background feed the general appeal to many low-income and vulnerable populations living precarious lives in Lima of this brave symbol of resistance. The devotees see Sarita Colonia's spirit as a living agent in their lives. Yet, different from the rural context of origin, in which the soul or spirit would be believed to inhabit the landscape and cosmos (a mountain top, a lightning strike; Abercrombie 1998), urban saints and spirits like hers dwell in material objects, especially in designated places in urban deathscapes, or they accompany the devotees in the form of talismans. While the traditional Andean beliefs continue to be present, the location of folk saints' magical powers have been adapted to a dense, complex and unequal urban context. Migrants' own biographies of displacement in a context of violent conflict and an unreliable state have been incorporated in the Superstar-Saints' massive mystification.

Leo Kopp and Salomé, Bogotá

Born in 1858 in Germany and deceased in 1927 in Colombia, entrepreneur Kopp, who was of Jewish descent, founded a brewery in Bogotá named Bavaria. Whereas not many details are known about his life (apart from the names of his relatives), scholars disagree about his personality. Was he a paternalistic boss, as most Colombian entrepreneurs were at that time (Calvo Isaza 1998, 90)? Or did he challenge the existing political order (Peláez 2001, 34)? Whatever his real-life personality was, he became famous only after his death when his son placed a bronze replica of Rodin's famous Thinker on his grave. That statue seemed to play a crucial role in sparking off the mystification of Kopp as a humane boss, as someone always inclined to listen to his workers and help them, as his slanted head symbolizes. His fame relates only to that specific quality of his caring attitude as a factory boss; it does not address any other general parts of his life as was the case with Sarita Colonia. This makes Leo Kopp a specialized folk saint. People turn to Kopp specifically to ask his support in obtaining an income, a job, money, or fortune. The veneration of Leo Kopp's grave should be understood in a larger urban context in the 1950s, when folk saint venerations became so popular within Cementerio Central that a pilgrimage route appeared. Although Leo Kopp's grave remains one of the most popular destinations today—especially on Mondays, known as *día de las ánimas* (day of the souls) but Sundays are also very crowded—the weekly pilgrimages of the poor and vulnerable in fact started when another cult had begun. This

concerned the sanctification cult of a controversial prostitute later known as María Salomé Muñoz de Parra (Peláez 2001; Castro Roldán and García 2015).

Salomé's popularity started with the rumor about the miracles ascribed to her in the 1950s, when her grave was still anonymously located in Cementerio Central's poor people's section. Thanks to her mythical status as *la milagrosa*, the miraculous, her remains were transferred to the elitist section. Her popularity turned into a controversy when the elite got annoyed with the numerous devotees, resulting in another transferal of her remains in the 1980s, this time to the poor people's Cementerio Sur. This series of events boosted the phenomenon of the Monday pilgrimages from the late 1950s onward. It was the period of internal war known as La Violencia, in which thousands of Colombians had fled the countryside. Parallel to the expansion of Bogotá with rural war refugees, an increasing number of dead figures in Cementerio central were turned into folk saints. All newly "discovered" saints had in common that their mythical accounts included some kind of rebellious struggle against Colombia's small but powerful establishment. In the early 1980s, when Bogotá had already become a metropolis, urban death cults became such a hype that the local government of Bogotá attempted to get rid of the devotees in Cementerio Central, first by fencing off the saints' tombs, then by temporarily requiring people to show an identity card at the entrance gate, and—ultimately—by removing Salomé's remains to Cementerio Sur (Peláez 2001).

The immense popularity of Leo Kopp's tomb still remains. To explain its popularity, we need to take the material aspects of the veneration into account. The golden-bright shiny metal of the Thinker statue and the inviting position of the ear lend itself to be approached with oral requests [Fig. 4]. People do not just wait in line to put flowers or presents or written appeals on the grave. Each devotee spends a few minutes alone with the statue, standing on the grave and embracing the statue

Fig. 4 Requests whispered in the ear of Kopp's statue, Bogotá. (Photo Christien Klaufus)

to be able to speak in the copper ear. People mumble their requests while guards protect their privacy during this intimate moment. The bodily performance and intimate interlacing between the devotee and the statue turn the veneration act into a literally embodied experience. After each visit, devotees and a few self-appointed guards clean and polish the ear. A lay priest sits at a table placed at the start of the waiting line. He sells prints of the "Prayer to the soul of Leo Sigifredo Kopp" (Calvo Isaza 1998, 90), but he does more than that: he also sells lottery tickets for devotees determined to ask Kopp for a fortune.

Two observations support my claims about transcendent rural traditions in an urban context and the memorialization of violence and abuse. First of all, Salomé's mystification clearly resembles the Sarita Colonia myth in the controversial and counter-hegemonic symbolism of both life stories. The initial anonymity of Salomé's grave, however, better fits the category of the "lost souls" described below than it fits the category of a folk saint. On the other hand, once she became known, Salomé's presence in the heart of an elite deathscape was more politically challenging than Sarita Colonia's shrine as it clearly accommodated a class struggle. The removal of her remains to a low-status cemetery were thus an effective political act to let the cult wane. My second point regards Superstar-Saint Leo Kopp. He became an immensely popular folk saint. However his popularity is *not* related to his power as an apt mediator in purgatory, but as a powerful and prestigious public figure. He is already envisioned as being in heaven, close to God as is evidenced in the printed prayer that addresses Kopp as, "You who lives in the abode of the lord your God" (Calvo Isaza 1998, 90; Varelo 2009, 12). So, different from the myths of Sarita Colonia and Salomé, Kopp's afterlife prestige as a soul living in the celestial mansion opens up a new horizon to devotees, who ask him to mediate directly between them and Almighty God. He is a Superstar-Saint with direct access to the Almighty. Therefore a visit to his grave needs to be well prepared.

Wandering Souls

A few steps from Leo Kopp's grave in the Cementerio Central in Bogotá, and in contrast with its shining appearance, stand the dilapidated niches in cheap vertical columbaria that are visited by other devotees whose performances are much less conspicuous. This is the realm of the *ánimas solas*, lost souls who also figure prominently in the set of folk beliefs about the mutual obligations between the living and the dead. The lost, or wandering, souls swarm the in-between (purgatory) where they can be approached with requests for favors. In contrast with the folk saints, however, these are not the well-known mythical figures. These are the forgotten dead, the nobodies whose souls are trapped in the in-between where they are deemed to stay forever unless a living person contacts them so they can prove their worthiness to be able to continue their journey out of purgatory into heaven. The more lost or desperate a soul is—measured by the level of physical neglect of a grave—the higher people's expectations are about its power to provide miracles on earth.

Therefore, the most deteriorated graves are popular sites for pilgrims and so are the burial spaces of people who committed suicide (Álvarez et al. n.d., 11–12). Niches where the remains of anonymous dead (called NNs) are buried are sometimes "adopted" by devotees for the same reason. In Colombia, their souls are symbolized by bags filled with water [Fig. 5]. Massive attention for a lost soul with magical powers can transform this dead person into a saint. This is in fact how Salomé became known when she was still a "nobody": her miracles made her famous.

In Bogotá the NNs are plentiful. Some died as victims in the violent conflict, others died nameless in the streets. Their remains are buried in one of the four public cemeteries. Within the circuit of the pilgrims their presence is important for two reasons. First of all, the presence of nameless human remains links the experiences of many displaced victims from the internal war who ended up in Bogotá directly to the notion of violent death. Second, since the most desperate souls are also considered to be the most powerful ones, deteriorated or empty graves are also linked to black magic and sorcery (Calvo Isaza 1998, 92). Assessing this phenomenon on a broader scale, it is clear that veneration of anonymous souls and spirits, either as white magic or in acts of sorcery, is common in many Latin American cities and occurs in cemeteries frequented by the populations that came to the city relatively recently. The Virgen de Lourdes cemetery in Lima is just one location where people go to seek contact with a wandering soul. As in other cemeteries, the tombs or niches that have fallen apart are the ones assumed to house a wandering soul. Some of these cults turn into sorcery, aiming to call on the spirits to petition harm on others. Two brothers visiting their mother's grave, where the cover stone had collapsed,

Fig. 5 Veneration of lost souls in Cementerio Sur, Bogotá. (Photo Christien Klaufus)

narrated how they had found evidence that witchcraft had been performed on this grave. First, they found a photograph of a young boy hidden inside the collapsed part of the grave. A few months later, they found a dead chicken on the grave. While food offerings to the sprits are common, locals know the difference between a nutritious dish traditionally served to the souls and a "substitute body" used in black magic (cf. González Puccetti 2009, 129). Commemoration and veneration activities in cemetery Virgen de Lourdes show how a traditional Andean belief in the dynamic relationship between body and soul has nested in an urban setting.

Life in Lima's informal settlements is partly based on everyday practices of exchange between the living and the dead. What is more, because visitors walk in and out of this deathscape at any moment and because the terrain covered by the cemetery is immense, it is difficult to distinguish activities at the grave as either a commemoration ritual for a relative or friend, or as the veneration of a more distant saint or soul. In any case, visitors and devotees never enter the cemetery empty-handed. They bring warm meals, alcohol, flowers, music and cards, balloons and notes with their wishes to the soul or requests for favors. They eat, drink, sing, and pray on the graves. A state of drunkenness is a core part of the communication process with the spirits and souls, as the deceased—recently as well as a long time ago (ancestors)—can be reached easier when drunk. In traditional Andean belief ritual drunkenness is considered a journey through time and space towards the ancestors (Abercrombie 1998). The mortuary traditions and sanctification cults performed on the cemetery thus reflect age-old ideas about the configuration of time and space, good and bad, life and afterlife (Ouweneel 2019). Every day of the week people enter the cemetery alone or in small groups to visit the graves of their loved ones, of miraculous saints, or of "nobodies". They enter to reproduce the stories and myths of those passed away, imbued with a belief in the benevolent or malevolent powers of these souls, and with hope for a better future. If registers of visiting relatives, pilgrims, and devotees existed for each cemetery in Lima and other metropoles, we would perhaps be able to pinpoint the relevance of these places for the Latin American city. Even with the lack of such clear figures, local accounts from different places sustain a similar conclusion (Graziano 2007; Losonczy 2001).

The City of the Dead as Cultural Hotspots: A Discussion

All metropoles in Latin America developed between the 1950s and 2000s from a massive in-flow of rural migrants. Halfway through that period several countries passed through episodes of armed struggle or political violence, with Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, Peru, Chile and Argentina as the most notorious ones. While economic factors had initiated the earlier flow to Latin America's primary cities, new groups escaping a violent countryside also ended up in the city, bringing their traditions, memories and worldviews with them. The Latin American metropolis developed and was transformed along with its citizens. Many sectors of the urban society were absorbed in the global economy, in which work, income, capital and

status became defining traits for one's success in life. The hierarchy of success and failure entered the world of the dead as much as it entered the world of the living. And yet, something interesting occurred right in these spaces of the dead that were explicitly not designed for the poor and marginalized; they started imbuing the cemetery with old and new cults, with the temporalities of remembrance, with *lieux de mémoire.* The rituals and sanctification cults are part of a specifically urban trend in Latin America, in which migrants and relative newcomers to the city make sense of their distant and not-so-distant past, and of their everyday struggles through systems of communication with the souls and spirits in the hereafter. The venerations, pilgrimages and new layers of meaning produced in designated cemeteries, gave these urban spaces of death and the dead a cultural vitality unknown in most European cemeteries. The Colombian anthropologist Gloria Inés Peláez notes that while countries like Colombia have constructed a very exclusivist memory of the national past,

> the cemetery, visited by ample popular sectors, bestows them with a sense of belonging and identity. There the devotees can recognize and construct common references that bring them closer to a national past which they see as something distant and inaccessible, but which they appropriate through their rites and their presence, participating as witnesses and as actors in the events, even getting to the point that they create their own saints to underline their living conditions as points of reference for the sanctification of some deceased…. (Peláez 2001, 25, my translation).

Peláez refers to the logic by which authorities designate the elite section of the cemetery as national heritage while erasing the poor people's graveyards to be redeveloped as parks or museums. This way, the everyday representations of that same past, fraught with inequality and violence, are erased from formal political memory (Calvo Isaza 1998). The reversal of this logic is found in the appropriation of the monumental section of the cemetery by groups whose pasts have been politically ignored and denied. Their presence in the cemetery not only restructures their personal lives and the community of fellow-devotees; it also changes the city by adding cultural layers of religion, beliefs, worldviews and memories anchored to the landscapes of death and the dead.

Unfortunately, precisely because these are the beliefs and practices of the displaced, the poor and the stigmatized, veneration cults and the location of the performance are under threat. Bogotá's Cementerio Central is increasingly programmed with activities targeting middle class visitors and tourists, such as art or car exhibitions (Klaufus 2018). In Lima's district of Villa María del Triunfo, municipal engineers have explored possibilities to attract private investors to "modernize" the cemetery in a planned and structured way. As in Bogotá, first attempts were also made to attract new groups of visitors and tourists by organizing theatric events consisting of "magical dance" in the cemetery, followed by an *ayahuasca* (a type of hallucinogenic drug) ritual led by a shaman. Such invented and out-of-place rituals threaten to replace the existing ones, imposing new ideas, calendars and materialities by serving groups of paying visitors who come here to consume magic. The urban cemeteries where Superstar-Saints and Wandering Souls dwell, accommodate the production of stories and histories of urbanites not otherwise accommodated.

The richness and diversity of these stories, cults and practices centering on the dead body and its on-living soul, is a valuable yet undervalued resource for many aspects of urban life. If the metropolis, like the forest, is an extensive environment then the public cemetery is a small, dense and threatened hotspot within that environment offering some rare examples of what mankind creates to connect life and death to make life worthwile.

References

Abercrombie, T. (1998). *Pathways of memory and power: Ethnography and history among an Andean people*. Madison/London: University of Wisconsin Press.

Acosta Aguirre, N. (2013). El cerro es el límite. *Quehacer, 191*, 122–128.

Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá. (2002). *La cultura ciudadana en Bogotá. Resultados de la primera aplicación del sistema de medición. Observatorio de cultura urbana*. Bogotá: Comisión de cultura ciudadana Instituto Distrital de Cultura y Turismo.

Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá. (2010). *Bogotá ciudad de estadísticas, boletín 23: Población y desarrollo urbano*. Bogotá: Secretaría Distrital de Planeación.

Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá. (2018). *Bogotá ciudad de estadísticas, boletín 93: Análisis demográfico y proyecciones poblacionales de Bogotá*. Bogotá: Secretaría Distrital de Planeación.

Allen, C. (2002). The hold life has: Coca and cultural identity in an Andean community. Washington, DC/New York: Smithsonian Books.

Álvarez, A., Arteta, F., Huamán, A., Meneses, B., Palacios, D., & Ramos, G. (2013). Lugares de muerte y luto: Una aproximación a los cambios de los espacios funerarios de la ciudad de Lima. *La Colmena, 5*(5), 10–21.

Álvarez, A., Arteta, F., Huamán, A., Meneses, B., Palacios, D., & Ramos, G. (n.d.). *Lugares de Muerte y Luto: Jardines de la Paz, Presbítero Maestro y Cementerio Municipal Virgen de Lourdes*. Unpublished paper, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales – Antropología.

APEIM Asociación Peruana de Empresas de Investigación de Mercados. (2017). *Niveles socioeconómicos 2017*. Lima: APEIM.

Ariès, P. (1976). *Western attitudes toward death from the middle ages to the present*. London: Marion Boyars.

Calvo Isaza, O. (1998). *El cementerio central: Bogotá, la vida urbana y la muerte*. Bogotá: Observatorio de cultura urbana.

Castro Roldán, A., & García, D. (2015). *La memoria colectiva y la muerte en el cementerio de Bogotá. In: La mort: imaginaires et sociétés. Mort et société / La muerte: imaginarios y sociedades. Amerika 12*. https://amerika.revues.org/6342

Dávila, A. (2016). *El mall: The spatial and class politics of shopping malls in Latin America*. Oakland: University of California Press.

DIGESA Dirección General de Salúd Ambiental. (2007). *Inventario de cementerios por departamentos*. Digital document. http://www.digesa.minsa.gob.pe/DEPA/inventario_cementerio/lima_2007.pdf. Accessed 4 May 2018.

Gandolfo, D. (2009). *The city at its limits: Taboo, transgression, and urban renewal in Lima*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.

Garrard-Burnett, V. (2015). Living with ghosts: Death, exhumation, and reburial among the Maya in Guatemala. *Latin American Perspectives, 42*(3), 180–192.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gilbert, A. (Ed.). (1996). *The mega-city in Latin America*. Tokyo: United Nations University Press.

González Puccetti, I. (2009). *Antropología de la muerte; Miradas desde el más acá. Ritos e historia en el Cementerio Central de Bogotá*. Bogotá: The English School/Tiempo de Papel Editores.
Graziano, F. (2007). *Cultures of devotion: Folk saints of Spanish America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Harvey, D. (2012). *Rebel city: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*. London: Verso.
Hawley, J. (Ed.). (1987). *Saints and virtues*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Hoffman, K., & Centeno, M. (2003). The lopsided continent: Inequality in Latin America. *Annual Review of Sociology, 29*(1), 363–390.
Huron, A. (2015). Working with strangers in saturated space: Reclaiming and maintaining the urban commons. *Antipode, 47*(4), 963–979.
INEI Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática. (1996). *Lima metropolitana: Perfil socio-demográfico*. Digital document. http://proyectos.inei.gob.pe/web/biblioineipub/bancopub/Est/LIb0002/indice.htm. Accessed 4 May 2018.
INEI Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática. (2018). *Pobreza monetaria afectó al 21,7% de la población del país durante el año 2017*. https://www.inei.gob.pe/prensa/noticias/pobreza-monetaria-afecto-al-217-de-la-poblacion-del-pais-durante-el-ano-2017-10711/. Accessed 17 May 2018.
Klaufus, C. (2014). Deathscapes in Latin America's metropolises: Urban land use, funerary transformations, and daily inconveniences. *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies, 96*, 99–111.
Klaufus, C. (2016a). Deathscape politics in Colombian metropolises: Conservation, grave recycling and the position of the bereaved. *Urban Studies, 53*(12), 2453–2468.
Klaufus, C. (2016b). The dead are killing the living: Spatial justice, funerary services, and cemetery land use in urban Colombia. *Habitat International, 54*(1), 74–79.
Klaufus, C. (2017a). Cemetery modernization and the common good in Bogotá. *Bulletin of Latin American Research, 37*(2), 206–221.
Klaufus, C. (2017b). *Spaces of representation and coexistence: Cementerio Virgen de Lourdes*. Paper presented at the international conference of the Latin American Studies Association, Lima, Peru, 30 April, 2017.
Klaufus, C. (2018). Colombian deathscapes: Social practices and policy responses. *Journal of Urban Affairs, 40*(2), 209–225.
Kong, L. (1999). Cemeteries and columbaria, memorials and mausoleums: Narrative and interpretation in the study of deathscapes and geography. *Australian Geographical Studies, 37*(1), 1–10.
Kosansky, O. (2002). Tourism, charity, and profit: The movement of money in Moroccan Jewish pilgrimage. *Cultural Anthropology, 17*(3), 359–400.
Lazo, R. (2012). Costumbres y tradiciones en cementerios de Lima el 1 de noviembre en tiempos de globalización. *Investigaciones Sociales, 16*(29), 189–198.
Lima Cómo Vamos. (2017). *VIII Informe de percepción sobre calidad de vida en Lima y Callao*.
Losonczy, A.-M. (2001). Santificación popular de los muertos en cementerios urbanos colombianos. *Revista Colombiana de Antropología, 37*, 6–23.
Maddrell, A., & Sidaway, J. (Eds.). (2010). *Deathscapes: Spaces for death, dying, mourning and remembrance*. Farnham: Ashgate.
Matos Mar, J. (2004[1984]). *Desborde popular y crisis del estado: El nuevo rostro del Perú en la década 1980*. (Enriched ed.). Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos.
MVMT Municipalidad de Villa Maria del Triunfo. (2016). *Plan operativo institucional 2016. Gerencia de Planeamiento y Presupuesto.*
O'Neill, K. (2012). There is no more room: Cemeteries, personhood, and bare death. *Ethnography, 13*(4), 510–530.
Ossio, J. (1999). Mortuary rituals in the Andes. *JASO, 30*(3), 301–316.
Ouweneel, A. (2019). Outsmarting the lords of death: An Amerindian cognitive script in comics. In F. Aldama (Ed.), *Graphing TransIndigenous Comic Books*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Peláez, G. (2001). Un encuentro con las ánimas; Santos y héroes impugnadores de normas. *Revista Colombiana de Antropología, 37*, 24–41.
Protzel, J. (2011). *Lima imaginada*. Lima: Fondo Editorial Universidad de Lima.
Reid, W. (1998). Biodiversity hotspots. *Tree, 13*(7), 275–280.
Reyes-Cortez, M. (2012). Extending current boundaries between the private, domestic and public display of mourning, love and visual culture in Mexico City. *Social History, 37*(2), 117–141.
Silverman, H. (2002). Chapter 11. Narratives and histories in modern cemeteries of Lima, Peru. *Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association, 11*(1), 167–190.
Sociedad de Beneficencia de Lima Metropolitana. http://www.sblm.gob.pe/cementerios-menu/el-angel. Accessed 6 June 2018.
UN-DESA United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2014). *World urbanization prospects. The 2014 revision, highlights*. New York: UN-DESA.
UN-Habitat United Nations Human Settlements Programme. (2012). *State of Latin American and Caribbean cities: Towards a new urban transition*. Nairobi: UN-Habitat.
Varelo, V. (2009). Magia: ¿rastros de una sociedad primitiva en medio de la modernidad del siglo XXI? In I. González Puccetti (Ed.), *Antropología de la Muerte: Magia, Brujería, Clases Sociales y Sexualidad en el Cementerio Central de Bogotá* (pp. 8–16). Bogotá: The English School/Tiempo de Papel Editores.
Vignolo, P. (2013). ¿Quién gobierna la ciudad de los muertos? Políticas de la memoria y desarrollo urbano en Bogotá. *Memoria y Sociedad, 17*(35), 125–142.
Villanueva, A., Niño, R., & Agreda, S. (2009). Dinámicas del mercado de tierras en el Cementerio Virgen de Lourdes. *Construyendo nuestra interculturalidad, 5*(4), 1–26.
Zeiderman, A. (2016). *Endangered city: The politics of security and risk in Bogotá*. Durham/London: Duke University Press.

He taonga tuku iho: Indigenous End of Life and Death Care Customs of New Zealand Māori

Tess Moeke-Maxwell, Kathleen Mason, Frances Toohey, Rawiri Wharemate, and Merryn Gott

Abstract Older Māori often have multiple and complex health issues that require a high level of end of life care. However, New Zealand's bio-medical focused health system does not cater for the type and level of holistic care preferred by its indigenous population. In this chapter, we argue that all families, including the ethnically diverse, would benefit from a health system that could deliver culturally informed, and spiritually aligned, end of life care. Ancestors and elders played a vital role in the inter-generational transfer of end of life care cultural knowledge to *whānau* (family, including extended family). Today, however, not all Māori have been able to retain their traditional identities and tribal traditions. The forces of colonialism and increasing ethnic diversity continue to influence, shape and produce contemporary heterogeneous identities. We argue for holistic indigenous care informed by the practice of *awhi*. Awhi is the physical expression of a cognitive, emotional and spiritual response to caring that is informed by the spiritual. This metaphor is used to describe a model of care that includes customs and protocols that wrap around the ill person and his or her family before, during and following death. This approach extends upon a Western biomedical concept of health, and service delivery, which views end of life care solely in terms of the life or death of the body.

Whāia te iti kahurangi ki te tūohu koe me he maunga teitei

Seek the treasure you value most dearly: if you bow your head, let it be to a lofty mountain

The Māori proverb above, is about aiming high, or aiming for what is truly valuable. Its deeper meaning lies in being persistent and not letting obstacles stop you from reaching your goal.

T. Moeke-Maxwell (✉) · K. Mason · F. Toohey · R. Wharemate · M. Gott
Te Ārai Palliative Care End of Life Research Group, School of Nursing, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand
e-mail: T.moeke-maxwell@auckland.ac.nz

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_18

Introduction

Following a life limiting diagnosis, Māori *whānau* (family, extended family) administer their love, care, empathy, compassion, support and aid until the *wairua* (spirit) travels through the portal of death to return home. Māori refers to the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand. Conceptually, awhi can be employed as a holistic metaphor to describe a whole system model of care that wraps around the ill person and his or her whānau before, during, and following death. Drawing on the awhi metaphor again, it is the physical expression of a cognitive, emotional and spiritual response to caring. A holistic systems care approach extends upon the Western biomedical concept of health which views end of life care solely in terms of the life or death of the body. This concept challenges the 'medicalisation of dying' (Clark 2002). Holistic end of life care treats whānau within the physical, emotional and spiritual context of their relationships. Living, like death and dying, is relational.

The introduction of holistic palliative care by Dame Cicely Saunders in 1967 (Saunders and Kastenbaum 1997) resulted in the specialist palliative care (hospice) movement which was taken up in New Zealand during the 1980s. This philosophical approach to end of life care encompasses the physical/medical, mental/emotional and spiritual domains of care which are valued by indigenous peoples (Dembinsky 2014; Duggleby et al. 2015; McGrath and Holewa 2006; Moeke-Maxwell et al. 2014). Under this model good care also includes care of the grieving family (AMoH 2016; HNZ 2012; Gott et al. 2017; Koti 2013; MoH 2001; Penney et al. 2009). In reality, if the financial costs associated with the implementation, resourcing and maintenance of New Zealand's specialist palliative care services were undertaken, including an evaluation of their infrastructures, environmental and spatial allocations, workforce development and service delivery, we would undoubtedly see that the true value and focus falls heavily in the physical/medical domain of care. In other words, specialist palliative care is driven largely by a biomedical focus on the body and is therefore inequitable – the social, cultural and spiritual care domains are often addenda to the core business of caring for the physical domain (Clark 2002). This is a concern for indigenous people who value end of life care that is inclusive of all health care domains – physical, spiritual, emotional, social, environmental and familial (Kidd et al. 2014; Frey et al. 2013; Gott et al. 2015a; Oetzel et al. 2015a, b). Every care domain should be prioritised and offered equally because health and wellbeing are interwoven (Marsden 2003).

Indigenous people from New Zealand recognise that health and wellbeing are part of a holistic system of care that is intimately connected to creation, spirit and cosmology; these influence time and space, creating form and the natural world, informing a past, present and a future (Marsden 2003). Therefore, good indigenous end of life care requires that care must be considered within the context of people's histories (McGrath and Holewa 2006; Hampton et al. 2010; Johnston Taylor et al. 2014), environments, ecosystems and even the organisms that live within these systems. Underpinning an indigenous holistic health care system is the idea that good

end of life care pays critical attention to the wellbeing of the energy life force and spirit that dwells within every living being. Marsden (2003) states:

> Like the New Physicists, the Māori perceived the universe as a 'process'. But they went beyond the New Physicists idea of the Real world as simply 'pure energy' to postulate a world comprised of a series of interconnected realms separated from aeons of time from which there eventually emerged the Natural World. This cosmic process is unified and bound together by spirit (p. 31).

The influences of whānau, *aroha* (love, care, empathy, compassion), and awhi govern generous, loving and open hearted care towards ill/dying people and their families across the following areas:

1. Before, during, and following death, care is administered to the ill and dying person; following death, care is administered to the deceased person's *tūpāpaku* (body) and wairua;
2. During the illness trajectory, at the time of death, and following death, care is administered to the grieving family. *Tangihanga* (funeral customs) and *kawe mate* (mourning ceremony) support this process.

Aroha and awhi influence the care given to the grieving whānau who have entered into a state of *tapu* (restriction, safety). The concept of tapu stems from its association with the spiritual domain; it covers the realm of the sacred, prohibited and restricted. A contemporary understanding of tapu says that:

> Tapu is about maintaining balance, about keeping people safe, about protecting each other, and the ensuing generations. Tapu is exercised or sustained because Māori consciously decide to believe in it; it persists because it works. Tapu is about survival and resilience … (Te Awekotuku 2007, p. 4).

While aroha and awhi go some way to describing the condition of the heart that permits whānau carers to perform care, it is the *tikanga* (customs and cultural practices) and *kawa* (protocols) that provide influence over the specific cultural practices and forms of care associated with aroha and awhi. Customs and protocols guide, strengthen and give structure to enable whānau to provide end of life care that is congruous with tribal values and beliefs (Moeke-Maxwell et al. 2014). Māori believe that physical death opens the gateway for the wairua to transition to the spiritual realm (Duggleby et al. 2015; Moeke-Maxwell and Nikora 2019).

Whatever happens before, during, and immediately following death, can influence the wellbeing of the ill person before death and this can affect the successful transition of his or her wairua. A death that goes well is likely to support the grief process more than a death that is poorly supported (Kelly et al. 2009). The effect of the death/transition can either be felt as divinely uplifting or heavy and heart breaking for the whānau, depending on the circumstances and quality of care leading up to death, during death and after death (Moeke-Maxwell and Nikora 2019). The spiritual transition of the dying person's spirit can be felt by the whānau as an energy force, and it can also affect the environment. Death is not an event that affects only the dying; if done well, death can be a spiritual panacea for the living, or conversely, an unanticipated cataclysm.

There is an urgent need to redress the occlusion of New Zealand's indigenous peoples' fundamental cultural customs within the health care system to ensure that their protective values and care practices are supported during the end of life process. The title of this chapter "he taonga tuku iho" refers to something of value handed down – traditional end of life care customs are tangible heirlooms, handed down by the *tūpuna* (ancestors).

Māori death customs (Beaglehole and Beaglehole 1945; Best 1934; Brown 1851; Reed 1963; Reid 2005) provide information about what whānau want and need to live and die well. Ethnicity informs how indigenous people navigate end of life care, access health services (Reid and Robson 2007), form relationships with staff, engage in informational exchanges and communicate their end of life care preferences (Kelly et al. 2009; Kidd et al. 2014; Reid 2011). Attending to culture is critical in getting things right (Dein 2006). Therefore, raising health and palliative care provider's awareness of indigenous peoples' customs will help to support the reframing of end of life care to become inclusive of indigenous people' needs, and importantly, those of older people, as they are often the most vulnerable (Dyall et al. 2011; Gott et al. 2015a).

In this chapter we reflect on the customs and protocols that Māori whānau draw on before, during, and following death. Older Māori often have multiple and complex health issues requiring a high level of care and their end of life preferences may differ from others (Dyall et al. 2011; Gott et al. 2017; Oetzel et al. 2015a). We first introduce the reader to Māori people, identity and cultural diversity in the context of contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand. We describe some fundamental Māori end of life care values and rituals whānau employ before death. Next, we introduce contemporary Māori death customs. Post-death customs are described in the final section.

Māori Identity, Homogeneity and Heterogeneity

There is much diversity of cultural identity amongst indigenous whānau today (Cormack and Robson 2010; Moeke-Maxwell 2005; SNZ 2015). There are cultural differences between *iwi* (tribe/s); there are cultural differences between whānau and there are cultural differences within whānau. Cultural identity is not fixed in stone. The waves of power that continue to reverberate through the tsunami of colonial history continue to impact contemporary Māori identity formation. The nation's social, political and economic trajectories have influenced Māori identity (Moeke-Maxwell 2005). Their cultural identity is adapting and flourishing, albeit in new hybridised forms (Carey 2016; Grennell-Hawke and Tudor 2018; Moeke-Maxwell 2005). It is this recognition of ethnic diversity we wish to hold on to while describing indigenous end of life care. For example, the New Zealand census results (2013) revealed that 598,605 people identified themselves having Māori ethnicity. Of 668,724 people who identified themselves as having Māori descent, those who

identified with at least one iwi totalled 535,941. This highlights that of the 668,724 total number of people who identified with Māori descent, 107, 381 chose not to identify themselves ethnically as Māori. Furthermore, there are many people of Māori descent who are unable to identify with any iwi despite knowing they are Māori. For example, in the 2013 census, 110,928 people of Māori descent did not know their iwi affiliations.

Despite the ethnic plurality of Māori, the term 'Māori' is useful in that it points to indigenous tribal trajectories with common genealogical threads, shared histories and collective experiences of colonisation and survival. Identity is still valued as is the collective guardianship, stewardship, trust, and custodial responsibilities held by iwi on behalf of specific geographical territories including lands, oceans and rivers. There are many cultural commonalities that iwi share in common. However, the term 'Māori' conceals many diverse histories and differences in cultural customs.

Māori Care Values Underpin End of Life Care

The values, beliefs and customs Māori whānau draw from to sustain their end of life care activities have always been tribally variable. Despite the changes that have impacted Māori culture, cultural identity and lifestyles, traditional end of life care customs are being retained by whānau to pass on to future generations. However, the agency of individuals and whānau to respond and adapt to neo-colonial forces and exposure to ethnic pluralism can also influence end of life care preferences (Reid 2005).

Moeke-Maxwell et al. (2014) identified six key cultural values in a reasoned Māori thematic analysis of the end of life experiences of 27 whānau. These values supported whānau by strengthening their resilience:

*Rangatiratanga (autonomy, chieftanship).*Whānau supported the rangatiratanga of those people diagnosed with a life limiting condition; they encouraged the older person to take charge of his or her own affairs for as long as he or she could. This included elders being supported to continue to honour their cultural obligations and to carry these out in their communities for as long as they could. Whānau strived to make life as normal as possible for the ill person, for as long as possible. However, when racism was experienced within the health system, this obstructed the rangatiratanga of the ill person being upheld. Moeke-Maxwell et al. (2014) provide an example of this. Allan, a former drug user, was stereotyped as a *current* drug user by staff, who withheld his pain medication after being admitted to an urban hospital for severe pain; he was diagnosed with cancer shortly afterwards (Moeke-Maxwell et al. 2014). Throughout the remainder of Allan's life, the memory of severe pain (and no pain relief) caused him to experience acute anxiety. Allan worried that pain relief would be witheld from him when he was dying. His whānau provided support and advocacy on his behalf; he received a formal apology from the hospital after an investigation showed that Allan had been stereotyped as a Māori drug user.

Whānau kotahitanga (family unity through consensus) was the second value identfied. When the news of a life-limiting illness emerged, whānau came together to support one another, to prioritise the care of the ill person and to share the obligation of care. Unification happened through meetings and having a common goal to provide the best care possible.

Aroha (love, care, empathy, compassion) was a dominant value. Aroha enriched, affirmed and bolstered trust and encouraged whānau to care for each other at the end of life. Close engagement and connections provided whānau with healing and sustenance.

Manaakitanga (kindness, generosity, support) was also a dominant value. Manaakitanga encompasses the responsibility of everyone to care for the dying person and to care for each other through sharing their collective resources.

Kaitiakitanga (guardianship, stewardship, trust) was highly valued among whānau. Kaitiakitanga highlighted that primary carers tend to have the 'big picture' view of illness, and the needs of the dying person were placed at the centre. Whānau take on the responsibility for the practical day-to-day living needs of the person and the household. If tasks are delegated, the primary carer coordinates these; they also have an advocacy role. The kaitiakitanga role is informed by the relationship to the person with a life limiting illness. This person also requires the capacity and skill to provide care. In the majority of cases the carer is a female relative although it is not uncommon for a male to be a primary caregiver; this reflects the close bond between the carer and the ill person. Care of the dying person becomes the central focus around which daily living, whānau and the household are organised.

Wairuatanga (spirituality) was crucial. The spiritual activities of whānau centred around tribal beliefs, religous practices, secular new age spiritual variations or a combination of these. Spirituality was a critical factor in coping with challenges experienced during the end-of-life journey (diagnosis, treatment, dying process, funerals, bereavement and unveilings). Spiritual belief systems fortified whānau resilience, relationships, morale, identity, they influenced meaning-making and uplifted the energy life force of the ill person and his or her whānau. Spiritual practices helped to provide solutions to issues and eased depression and anxiety.

Financial Challenges at End of Life

Whānau caregiving often takes place against a backdrop of social disenfranchisement (Gott et al. 2015b). In a qualitative bicultural study that investigated the financial costs at end of life (Gott et al. 2015b) the findings highlighted that all Māori whānau interviewees (n = 11) suffered financial hardships. The cultural obligation to provide good end of life care, including cultural care, often led families to amass debt. Whānau who were already struggling financially were now faced with the additional financial burden associated with caregiving. The study highlighted that some of the costs experienced by Māori were shared in common with non-Māori; these reflected the normal care activities associated with caregiving, such as

transport and parking costs to attend medical appointments, pharmaceuticals products and equipment, increased electrical (heating) and telephone expenses as well as special clothing and personal hygiene items (Gott et al. 2015b).

However, Māori whānau also bore additional costs associated with the ill or dying person's cultural requirements. These included hosting *manuhiri* (guests) prior to death and following death, ensuring the ill person had access to specific foods to uplift their energy life force, and providing *rongoā* Māori (plant medicine such as salves), water from specific streams or rivers or natural healing. Whānau often had a cultural obligation to ensure the dying people returned home to visit their ancestral lands, gravesites or relatives before they died. They also arranged and supported the ill person to attend meetings to discuss important issues concerning his or her iwi such as ensuring the continued succession of land guardianship and the protection of legacies were in place, or to discuss where his or her tribes' preference for place of burial was. This type of support required whānau to contribute transport, food, gifts, and money and most importantly, their time. Furthermore, whānau often gave up work to provide care, adding additional financial stress.

Care at Home

It is important for Māori that they accompany the dying person 24 hours a day, particularly when they are nearing death. Preparing and maintaining a home during this period is very important. Most Māori wish to die at home and it is common to have many visitors before death. Māori often have multiple homes (ancestral, urban, or homes of other family members) (Gott et al. 2015b; Moeke-Maxwell et al. 2015). However, as death approaches complex health issues may require the person to transfer to a hospice, residential care or hospital setting. This is generally accepted by whānau whose main concern is that the ill person gets the best treatment and that his or her family can be with them. This is not always easy given the limitations placed on large families who want to be by the ill person's bedside in a hospital or hospice setting. It is common for New Zealand hospitals and hospices to offer a whānau room for families to use and this can be very helpful.

Whānau also play an important role in navigating and coordinating health care and accessing statutory support. This is much easier if a family has someone who works in the health sector or they have a tertiary qualification and/or know how to navigate the complex health system (Moeke-Maxwell et al. 2014). The reality is that many Māori find accessing health and palliative care services difficult. When they are successful, there are often barriers to obtaining and understanding health information (Kidd et al. 2014), and they often experience poor staff communication (Oetzel et al. 2015a). A lack of space makes it difficult for staff to conduct meetings with families in culturally appropriate ways. There are few Māori working in the health and palliative care workforce, and a lack of cultural safety has been identified within different health care settings. Cultural values and customs are important as they guide whānau from the time someone receives a life limiting diagnosis to his

or her final breath (Moeke-Maxwell et al. 2014). These values sustain the ill person and his or her whānau over days, weeks, months and in some cases, years, as with care of those with chronic illnesses such as dementia, stroke and some cancers.

He Tikanga Mate – Death Customs

Ngā Tohu Wairuatanga – Spiritual Signs

Spiritual signs signal to whānau that the time is getting close for their dying family member's spirit to transition. As death draws near, dreams, omens and spiritual experiences prepare whānau for the cessation of the person's vital functions (Moeke-Maxwell et al. 2014). It is normal for whānau to ascribe meaning to these experiences. They can take place weeks, days or moments before death. For example, the dying person may experience dreams, visions or encounters with loved ones who have passed over. Individuals who are not known to have the gift of prophecy or clairvoyance may suddenly share what they have seen or heard with trusted relatives and friends. This can involve the dying person's observing or conversing with deceased relatives or close friends. It is common for Māori to discuss any signs or omens that may occur at this time as they try to make sense of these spiritual messages. Whānau may observe the dying person staring into space or concentrating on something only they can see; loved ones show their support by enquiring what the person is doing or seeing. This can open up a space to converse with people about their transition and helps to prepare everyone for what is to come. Whānau themselves may hear or see things from the spirit world that can prepare them for the imminent death and the transition of the dying person's spirit to the heavenly realms (Moeke-Maxwell and Nikora 2019).

Many whānau observe the ritual of prayer to help the person let go and release his or her spirit (Witana 1997). Once released the spirit is free to join its Creator and ancestors. Prayer helps the dying person to have faith in the Creator and the afterlife (Moeke-Maxwell et al. 2014). Gentle words are used to help transition the spirit from the body, encouraging it to journey towards the portal of death. Meanings are often ascribed when someone lingers longer than expected – something may be unresolved or worrying the ill person which prevents his or her transition. Lingering may also be attributed to the dying person waiting for the arrival of a special relative and the opportunity to say his or her final goodbye.

Rongoā Māori – Māori Plant Medicine, Natural Healing

Whānau organise and administer healing using plant medicine to bring healing and comfort (Jones 2012). Massage and the use of oils and natural balms can also be used to soothe physical discomfort. An infusion of Pepper Tree leaves can be drunk as a hot or cold tea to ease an upset stomach. Some whānau enlist the support of family who specialise in this area of work and they may seek natural therapies from other healers.

Te Ōhākī – Final Instructions

Te ōhākī (final instructions spoken by the dying) are important for whānau to hear (Witana 1997). These may be words of encouragement directed to individuals on how to conduct their lives, or there may be instructions to indicate what the dying person's wishes are and who will carry these out on his or her behalf. Witana (1997) comments that the dying person might wish to leave certain legacies to people before they go, or, as with the case of a chiefly leader, news of succession may be passed on.

Karakia – Prayers, Incantations, Chants, and Waiata – Songs, Hymns

It is common for prayers to be used at every end of life phase, both before, during and after death (Ngata 2005). Some families may follow strict spiritual traditions that have been handed down from their iwi and ancestors, while others may follow religious rituals (often Christian in origin) and commonly, a mixture of both (Moeke-Maxwell et al. 2014). Many whānau still have experts that guide whānau through this process.

Spiritual beliefs and practices will determine the nature of the songs and prayers (Ngata 2005) employed. Whānau may observe several spiritual belief systems within one family; these will be represented by different people and each will be given a turn to lead an aspect of the post death rituals. However, especially with religious whānau, it is still common for the incantations to be said by a priest as the person dies. Prayers are also said each time the body is moved, from the death bed to the undertaker's gurney, for example, or when it is transported to different environments.

Tangi – Cry, Express Grief

At the time of death whānau express their grief openly with crying or wailing (Ngata 2005). However, the heart wrenching wailing that was customary until last century is not heard as often on *marae* (ancestral home, gathering place) as it was. Bereaved whānau are reminded of the eternal flow of life and death and are encouraged to show their love in the gift of their falling tears and in the flow of their nasal mucous (Witana 1997).

Post-Death Care

Te Mahi – Preparation of the Body After Death

Formerly, the total care and preservation of the body was left in the care of people who had the knowledge and skill to wash and prepare the body for viewing following death. Witana (1997) reflects on traditional body preparation customs:

> By tradition, the first duty of the nearest relations, mainly the elderly women, was to prepare the body for its consequent lying in state. The body was first washed with water and then with shark oil. Shark oil was preferred, even though it had a foul odour, for this was the most potent preservative that was available at that time. There were other oils such as pigeon, whale, root oils. … The body was then trussed in a sitting position with the knees drawn up to the chin. The head was elaborately decorated with feathers and well-soaked in shark oil. The body was clothed up to the chin with finely woven flax mats, some of which were sent by neighbouring relations. A chief's corpse would be accompanied by additional fineries such as his personal korowai (feather cloak) or jewelry such as earrings, and carved walking sticks (pp. 95–96).

Until quite recently (mid-twentieth century) iwi continued to wash their deceased in specific areas of a river or stream. This place was considered a restricted area and was therefore kept solely for this purpose. A flat rock, or area, was dedicated to the laying out, washing and preparation of the body. Depending on the rank of the deceased, the body would be adorned in fine clothing including the addition of feathered cloaks (Witana 1997).

Today, most whānau engage the services of funeral directors. Embalming uses chemicals and this is still the preferred Western method of preserving the body. Some whānau today however, are reclaiming past customs, preferring not to embalm with chemicals, and so treat the body more naturally as did their ancestors. Preservation rituals may involve the use of oils rubbed into the skin before and following death. Natural fibres from plants can be used to pack cavities and to help conceal odours.

Close whānau may wish to wash and dress the body before it is laid out in the casket. For example, an elderly parent may be washed and dressed by his or her adult children (often daughters), nieces and grandchildren. It is common for the ill person to provide instructions on what favourite outfit will be worn. If the death is

sudden, his or her closest whānau choose clothing based on their knowledge of the individual. If the deceased has a profession (a minister for example), they may choose to be interred in this garment. If whānau still have feathered cloaks in their possession these may be placed upside down, on top of the casket; this signals its removal before the burial. For example, the collar end sits over the feet of the body to signal it can be removed safely. Otherwise, if desired, the cloak and other heirlooms can be buried with the individual (Witana 1997). Once the casket is placed in the ancestral meeting house, photos of deceased family members are laid on, or at the foot, of the casket. These photos bring the memory of deceased family members to the hearts of those who are grieving which can be a great comfort.

Whakawātea – Cleansing Ritual, to Free or Clear

Once the body has been removed from the place of death the custom is to cleanse and clear the room. The room is cleaned by use of holy water to ensure the spirit of the deceased leaves the premises safely. This is normally done by a minister or someone who has spiritual leadership within the whānau. It is common for the ritual to take place in hospitals, hospices and residential care facilities today. Some whānau, like some institutions, may prefer to leave the room undisturbed for a short period of time before another person or patient inhabits the space.

Tangihanga (Funeral) Customs

Ancient funeral customs are one of the last Māori cultural institutions to survive the influences of colonialism (Ngata 2005; Oppenheim 1973; Phillips 1954). The tangihanga is considered the cultural pinnacle of Māori culture. It is a most deeply profound and spiritually meaningful ritual.

Customary post-death rituals involve whānau bringing the deceased's body to the ancestral home where it lies in state, generally in an open casket, for a period of approximately three or more days (Marsden 2003). Historically, the body could lie in state for two or more weeks to allow people to travel to pay their respects. Today, the body is placed in either a meeting house or a house especially built for the deceased to lie in state during the funeral. The core word 'tangi' means to cry and express grief; those who visit the deceased and their grieving whānau openly join in this process. Historically, many iwi did not permit children at funerals but this has changed since colonisation (Dieffenbach 1843).

During the funeral ceremony the grieving whānau live at the ancestral home for the duration of the ritual. There is provision to reflect on the life of the deceased, to memorialise them with eloquent *karanga* (ceremonial call of welcome to visitors on to an ancestral home) and speechmaking and sharing of stories about the deceased. People speak directly to the deceased until the time of internment. In former times,

the body was placed somewhere where it could decompose in a protected environment, either in a cave, or hung in a cage on the branch of a tree or placed inside a vessel of some kind. The bones were later retrieved, cleaned, and placed in a concealed place (a tree hollow or cave) (Witana 1997).

Following colonisation, Māori adopted the burial method of internment, and it is not uncommon today for Māori to use the cremation method, often for financial reasons. Traveling to ancestral homes can be financially costly, especially for whānau on low wages or for those who have to travel long distances to return home (Gott et al. 2014; Moeke-Maxwell et al. 2014). Traditionally, the costs of the large funeral were borne by the community but most often today the costs to hire an ancestral home and feed the grieving whānau and visitors are borne mainly by the grieving whānau (Claire 2005). Gifts and money given by visitors help to offset the high costs associated with catering as well as other funeral expenses, such as the funeral director's fee or cost of the coffin. Some funerals may be quite modest affairs, but some will be attended by hundreds or thousands of mourners. Numbers increase depending on the status or prestige a person has within his or her iwi and within the nation. Funerals reflect the specific tribal protocols of each iwi (Nikora and Te Awekotuku 2013). There may also be different sequences observed within rituals. The following account provides a general description of the process.

As soon as a family member dies, people of the village are notified to enable them to prepare for the arrival of the deceased and the mourners. Often it is men who will go to the sea to fetch fish and seafood, while others will procure meats to sustain the grieving family and visitors for approximately 3 days. Those who have extra crops from their harvest, such as potatoes, *kūmara* (sweet potato), or pumpkin, and those who have access to sow thistle or watercress gather their offerings. Others who are known for making special food products, such as rēwana bread, cakes or delicious puddings, are notified. There are often one or two people in charge of the large communal kitchen and dining area, many of which are capable of seating up to 500 or more.

Now, where many families work and live some distance from their ancestral homes, food items are often bought from supermarkets. The offerings of indigenous seafood and carefully prepared dishes may be less evident today because of the financial costs, or at least they are only reserved for the feast following the burial. Many iwi are associated with special foods that are locally sourced from their area. There may also be special methods used to prepare the food.

Pōwhiri – Welcome Ceremony (to Take the Body on to the Marae, and the Grieving Family)

The people at home prepare the ancestral meeting house for the arrival of the body and the bereaved whānau (Witana 1997). The house has seating arranged for visitors and floor coverings and mats are laid for the casket to rest on and for grieving whānau to sit next to their deceased loved one. Photos of the deceased person's ancestors are placed at the foot of the casket. The wall the body rests against is

known as the *ārai* (veil) signifying the veil between life and death. When the body has been prepared it is taken back to the ancestral home for the funeral. The name for the welcome ceremony to bring people on to the ancestral home is the *pōwhiri*. The grieving whānau wait with the deceased to be called on to the ancestral home at the gate in front of the meeting house. The first call that is heard is from the women callers of the marae. Women have a special place in the oratory exchange; they expresses themselves in the ceremony. Women establish the sense of the gathering and they activate the spirit within those coming on to the ancestral home and within those waiting to greet them. Doing so, the women activate the spiritual realm. Her call joins the living with the spiritual and divine realm; she invites the visitors to take part in a ceremony to bid farewell to the deceased and to care for the grieving whānau.

The ceremony continues as the grieving family leave via the gate to make their way across the spatial area before entering the ancestral meeting house. There may be several women calling at different times, their overlapping voices assume different sequences, while piercing the air with their sorrowful, haunting cry of welcome and love. They will continue to fulfil their roles with each subsequent group of mourners visiting the ancestral home over the next few days. In some iwi it is appropriate for a male to lead a group onto the ancestral home with a soulful protective incantation. A woman will also call to acknowledge gifts given during the ceremony and her spiritual support will be integral during the funeral service and final farewell, as well as the *nehu* (burial).

The whānau group bringing the deceased on to the marae has its own designated female caller; she reciprocates in the formal welcome ceremony by responding to the welcoming call of host woman/women callers by returning her call. She acknowledges the genealogy of the ancestral home, the land, the hosts and the reason for coming to the ancestral home. The mourners begin the slow, solemn walk towards the ancestral meeting house – the women's calling unites the living and the dead and the whānau as they accompany the deceased onto their ancestral home. Some iwi conduct their ceremonies outside the ancestral meeting house; for example, a local family may sit to the right side of the spatial area directly in front to welcome visitors. The visitors sit on the left. However, other iwi may conduct their ceremonies on the veranda of the meeting house, or inside.

Once inside the ancestral meeting house, specific rituals are adhered to according to the protocols set by each iwi. These may include the positioning of the body within the ancestral meeting house, the seating arrangements of the speech maker's bench and the spatial positioning of the chief mourners and guests. For example, some iwi place the body against the back wall, feet facing the door. Some iwi seat the deceased's maternal whānau to their left and their paternal whānau to their right. Those involved in the formalities of speechmaking sit on chairs facing one another on opposite sides of the house, a large open planned building, often adorned inside with wooden carvings and woven panels. As stated, the exact positioning of the coffin and the visitors will depend on the protocols of that specific iwi.

Once the deceased and his or her whānau are inside the ancestral meeting house the casket lid is taken off and prayers are said. Singing follows speechmaking. It is

becoming more common today to use traditional carved burial chests or woven flax shrouds. Usually it is women who provide support and guidance to a speaker via the selection of songs and leadership of the singing. Songs are selected to endorse the content of the speech and the speechmaker. The exchange of greetings ritual is an important part of the funeral. Many speechmakers are men trained in the art of oratory.

Traditionally both male and female attendees adorn their heads with head wreaths woven from greenery. These are powerful funeral symbols and many people still observe this ritual today. Greenery is coiled to form a wreath around the head, allowing the leaves to fall freely down across the forehead to represent the veil between the physical and the metaphysical realms. They also symbolise the mourners' state of tapu – they have entered into a spiritual and solemn space where their hearts join with other bereaved mourners. The leaves that cascade down over the forehead and eyes represent falling tears.

With each new arrival of guests at the ancestral gateway, the ceremony begins; many ceremonies will take place over the course of the funeral. It is the responsibility of speechmakers to reflect on the sad occasion, reminisce about the person who has died and to say encouraging and uplifting things to support the mourners and to welcome new groups of mourners. It is not uncommon for tears to be shed, or jokes to be made during these sad occasions (Ngata 2005). Although speechmakers are deeply aware of the sadness of the occasion, each one aims to lift the mourners out of sadness. They try to uplift peoples' spirits by sharing a humorous story about the person who has died or they may make a funny remark about a political debate.

Each group of visitors will enter the ancestral meeting house, greet the deceased and pay their respects to the bereaved whānau in the same manner we described when the bereaved whānau arrived at the ancestral home. The visitors enter the ancestral meeting house; depending on local customs they may kiss the relatives first before walking slowly across the floor of the ancestral meeting house to the place where the body lies in state, flanked either side by the deceased's whānau. Or, depending on protocol, they will greet the deceased and the principle mourners first, before greeting the relatives. Visitors may be crying or wailing. Women may continue to call as they enter the ancestral meeting house; their eerie call to *Io-matua-kore* (the supreme being), ancestors and the deceased may continue until they reach the casket.

Once the visitor reaches the foot of the casket they observe certain protocols which may include saying prayers or they may address the body directly, speaking to the deceased as if the person were still alive. Māori believe the spirit is present during the funeral and until the body is interred. The visitors/mourners stand in front of the body and their head wreaths are removed. They make their way to the side of the casket where they kneel down – the deceased person is spoken to lovingly, hugged, stroked and kissed. Following this, the mourners will greet each member of

the whānau before taking their places alongside them (if they themselves are close whānau) or they will make their way to the seating reserved for visitors.

As stated, visitors are formally welcomed to the ancestral meeting house. Speechmakers will highlight different things; they will reflect on the various aspects associated with the reason for the gathering as well as discussing details of the funeral service and burial. Guests are included in this ritual. They explain who they are and their connection to the deceased and the grieving whānau. It is a time to lament and express deep sorrow (Witana 1997). Speechmaking helps to connect and bind the mourners together until they become one family by the end of the ritual. This is confirmed by a physical greeting; each person takes part in the pressing of noses where the breaths mingle, and they are expected to shake hands. Next, visitors are invited to partake in refreshments in the dining room.

Many ancestral homes provide water to cleanse people of the association with tapu upon leaving the ancestral meeting house. This normally involves pouring a stream of water across the hands and/or sprinkling the water over the head and body. A small group of people, including some people sitting on the speechmaking bench, and perhaps some mourners, will join the manuhiri in the dining room. These gatherings normally last for a short time before the mourners and speechmakers return to the ancestral meeting house to resume their positons and take part in their cultural obligations. Historically, those closely involved with funerals did not eat or drink until after dark and did so, in silence, away from others. Ngata (2005) recalls that principle mourners would historically eat their meal in the exact place the corpse was laid during the feast following the internment of the body– this reflects the power of food to return the environment and people to an ordinary, pre-tapu state.

The ancestral meeting house symbolically represents the womb of *Papatūānuku* (Earth Mother) and women, and therefore shoes are generally not permitted to be worn inside. In this safe haven whānau keep the deceased person's body constantly companioned. It is common for the majority of mourners to take an evening meal for example, and one or two people will stay behind with the deceased. Each ancestral home is normally equipped with its own mattresses and most have linen for these occasions. Those with the closest kinship connections will most likely wish to sleep next to the deceased. The woman relative who performs the calling ritual often has the additional task of caring for the body and she carefully arranges a cloth to be placed over his or her face at night which she removes in the morning. She is also careful to ensure that the body looks nice and is presentable for viewing and touching.

Again, each iwi will have slightly different protocols and ways of doing things, post-death (Claire 2005; Reid 2005). Some tribes allow the body and mourners to be welcomed at the ancestral home at any time of the day or night, while others adhere to strict guidelines; in some areas the body may only be brought on after dawn or before sundown. No food or drink is generally tolerated in the ancestral meeting house. Restrictions are similarly observed with smoking cigarettes of partaking of alcohol or harmful substances in or around the marae; the ancestral home is considered a reverent space and the health of the people is prioritised.

It is an honour for other relatives to arrive at the ancestral home to request the deceased's body be taken to another tribal ancestral home to lie in state, and to be buried there (Witana 1997). Sometimes these requests can evoke great debates among the whānau and these are resolved by the elders and whānau through open discussion. Sometimes consent is given, and other times not. Iwi have their own protocols for managing these complex cultural processes.

On the night before the funeral service and the burial, whānau and friends observe the final night ritual; the evening generally starts in the same way as the previous nights (prayers and singing). This evening is somewhat different in that whānau reflect on the deceased person's life, and there is often much celebration, laughter and singing. Despite the deep sadness felt by everyone in the room, an attitude of love and gratitude is expressed for the deceased. However, if the deceased was a difficult person or they had certain character flaws, these will be openly reflected on and discussed. This is the time for honest reflection; saying things out in the open is a characteristic of being Māori, particularly when the family is safely cocooned in their ancestral home.

Te rā Nehu – the Day of the Burial

On the day of the burial some iwi prefer to put the lid on the casket just before sunrise; this process is often an extremely emotionally painful time for whānau and the ritual is made easier by prayers, calling and singing. It is normal for the funeral service to be held at the ancestral home before leaving for the burial grounds (Witana 1997). This is generally led by a minister. Moving the deceased from the building can be a very painful process and once again, praying, calling and singing can assist. Calling will often continue while the deceased is being carried to the waiting vehicle and again, when the vehicle leaves for the cemetery. The calling ritual also continues as the body is carried on to the burial site. The burial service takes place at the grave site. When the casket is lowered into the ground, this can be very painful for whānau, and prayers, calling and singing can help to ease the emotional distress of the mourners.

Following the burial, and upon leaving the cemetery, the bereaved often wash their hands and/or faces with water that has been made especially available for this purpose. A small group of people with strong spiritual faith, will tramp the house; this ritual is used to cleanse the deceased person's home and to ensure his or her spirit successfully transitions to the next realm (Witana 1997). The vehicle in which the corpse has travelled will also be similarly cleansed.

After the burial, the mourners gather back at the ancestral home where they are greeted anew; a female caller welcomes everyone back into daylight, and the world of the living. After the protocols have been observed, the funeral attendees enjoy the feast. This is to remove the restrictions associated with tapu as is appropriate to the occasion. Ngata (2005) points out that at some ancestral homes the tradition to have

the feast after the burial has changed; some iwi now have it before the internment to support those families who have long distances to travel home.

The feast is also a time of celebration and is generally associated with the finest foods including a variety of meats, seafood, vegetable dishes and desserts. It is common for the food to be cooked traditionally in an oven pit. Thanking the cooks through impromptu speeches and singing gives prestige back to those who have prepared the meal. This is a time of laughter, singing and gratitude.

Te Kawe Mate – Mourning Ceremony

The mourning ceremony ritual takes the memory of the spirit of the deceased to another ancestral home (Ngata 2005). Although the process of taking the deceased's memory to other ancestral homes might be occurring less frequently in some whānau (Ngata 2005), the person's photo/spirit is often still taken to family events (weddings, birthdays, celebrations). This generally ceases at the time of the memorial service which generally takes place within 1–5 years of the death (Ngata 2005). These 'returning the memory of spirit' processes help with grieving. Although it is recognised that the person lives forever, the final part of the end of life care journey concludes with the memorial service (Ngata 2005). This ritual provides a certain finality.

The headstone unveiling ritual can almost be as large as the funeral itself and it too requires a similar amount of preparation and resourcing. It may take place over one or more days. An ancestral home may need to be booked for this event and needs to be well coordinated and resourced.

Variations, Challenges and New Adaptations – Tangihanga

Variations of tribal death customs are being employed by Māori whānau today (Claire 2005; Gott et al. 2014; Moeke-Maxwell et al. 2014, 2015). Given the growing ethnic and cultural diversity amongst contemporary whānau, the scope for developing new care practices is emerging. For example, many Māori are choosing cremation and are breaking with the traditional custom to bury their dead. Iwi are being challenged to accommodate these new phenomenon and adapt to these changes. Traditionally, Māori welcome bodies (not ashes) into their ancestral meeting houses. However, some whānau choose cremation to reduce the cost of burial, particularly for urban families who would have to buy expensive plots in public cemeteries (Moeke-Maxwell et al. 2014). Whānau are also favouring more contemporary and non-secular funerals that may not resemble their Māori customs at all. There are also deaths and funerals that are being shared with whānau and the public via social media. As Reid (2005) points out, "we are complex, challenging and

developing – as is our right" (p. 47). Claire (2005) states that many Māori who are distanced from their ancestral homes are often unprepared to cope with a funeral:

> It can be hard for people who are not closely connected to their marae. Often, all they know is that they've got to take their tūpuna home to where he or she was brought up. And when they get to the marae, someone says, do this, and they do it. They don't know *why* they're doing it. They're so vulnerable… And there's a lot of stress. They can't sleep, they're not used to living in the communal situation, they're missing work for 3 days, they're worried about what the boss is going to say and how much it's going to cost them. There's a big cost to the community as well, because people don't always understand now about koha – the personal contribution that needs to be made. This is something that people from other cultures really need to know about, and act on, when they come to a tangi (p. 44).

Furthermore, cross-cultural funerals are not always smooth sailing cultural events. Edge (2017) highlights many sites of conflict, processes of negotiation and pathways lead to cultural resolution for whānau over the course of preparing and carrying out funerals or Western-styled funerals. Indigenous customs and protocols are also positively influencing many non-Māori New Zealanders (including fifth and sixth generation descendants of white British settlers) to adapt their funeral practices. It is not uncommon today to see non-Māori families designing their own post-death practices along similar lines in an effort to be closer to the deceased and to be more inclusive and caring of grieving family and visitors. For example, the deceased's body may be placed in a lounge where family can sleep next to it; this is an important part of feeling connected to the deceased and being able to grieve. Indeed, some non-Māori are beginning to conduct their funerals as more communal affairs involving family, friends, work colleagues and neighbours.

Responsiveness of the Health Sector

The cultural responsiveness of the health sector towards Māori has only been partially realised (McLeod 2016). To date, Māori cultural preferences have largely been subjugated beneath a Western biomedical health care system approach. Although exemplary medical care is critical, the lack of an indigenous holistic and community led approach to end of life care, signals a noticeable gap. There is now some urgency to redress this gap; under the parameters set by the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), the health and palliative care sectors are obligated to respond to Māori end of life cultural preferences, particularly as increasing number of older indigenous deaths are projected to nearly double over the next 30 years (McLeod 2016). The strain placed on whānau, who will provide the bulk of care, can be eased by services that assist whānau by increasing the sectors' cultural capacity to meet their end of life cultural care needs.

To be inclusive of whānau is to be responsive in caring for their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing (HNZ 2012; MoH 2001). Customs and protocols that whānau draw from reflect the values and customs inherent in ordinary, daily practices that have been handed down by their ancestors (Moeke-

Maxwell et al. 2014). These customs include a collective whānau system of care, involvement of iwi and sub-tribes, particularly just prior to death and afterwards, connection with the ancestral home and burial practices. However, providing holistic, whānau-centred care is not as easy for contemporary whānau; today there are often not enough family members available to share these collective care responsibilities or to share the financial costs associated with of end of life care. Many whānau have not been able to retain their traditional care customs. The health sector must stretch its vision and budget to adapt its services to offer a holistic model of end of life care to whānau who need help. End of life care is whānau-centred and is not something that stops when a person takes his or her last breath.

Final Comment

We have described some of the key values and customs that influence the way Māori carry out end of life care and post-death care. Currently, much more is known about the ancient care rituals following death (Ngata 2005; Witana 1997). Because less is known about the specific Māori cultural care customs leading up to death, the Pae Herenga study is now being undertaken by the authors to systematically gather qualitative evidence on traditional end of life care customs and to record any adaptions and phenomena that might help or hinder whānau to utilise their customs within different health care settings. Digital story workshops will also capture short videos featuring peoples' own stories and photographic images about life, illness, death and post-death care.

After reviewing Māori end of life care customs and death customs we can be certain that good end of life care cannot be separated from the physical, social/economic, spiritual, familial and health and environmental contexts. Customs and protocols associated with end of life care survive because Māori whānau give meaning to living, dying and death – they protect, guide, uplift, fortify, encourage and restore things back to their normal state. Indigenous cultures have much to offer others about their physical and spiritual transitionary pathways and healing processes (Duggleby et al. 2015).

In New Zealand, the health system mainly focuses on the physical and medical domain. It is vital that indigenous people challenge this imbalanced health perspective through the retention, reclamation and adaptation of their own values, customs and rituals. If Māori customs and protocols help to nurture and protect the dying, and heal the grieving souls of the bereaved, perhaps these ancient customs will help to reveal, and heal, the suffering spirit of the health system. As Marsden (2003) reminds us:

- The ultimate reality is *wairua-spirit*
- The universe is 'Process'
- *Io Taketake*, is First Cause, Ground of Being, Creator and genesis of the cosmic process.

– Spirit is ubiquitous, imminent in the total process; upholding/sustaining/replenishing/regenerating all things by its *hau* or *mauri* (Breath of Life-principle).
– As a corollary of the above, the All is One and interlocked together.
– Man is both human and divine an integral part both of the cosmic process and of the natural order.
– The Māori approach to life is holistic. There is no sharp division between culture, society and their institutions (p. 33).

References

Associate Minister of Health. (2016). *Healthy aging strategy*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.
Beaglehole, E., & Beaglehole, P. (1945). Contemporary Maori death customs. *The Journal of Polynesian Society, 54*(2), 91–116.
Best, E. (1934). *The Maori as he was: a brief account of Maori life as it was in pre-European days*. Wellington: Dominion Museum.
Brown, W. (1851). *New Zealand and its aborigines*. London: J. & D.A. Darling.
Carey, M. J. L. (2016). *A transformative journey of cultural recovery: Te Ao Maori.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Southern Queensland, Australia.
Clark, D. (2002). Between hope and acceptance: The medicalisation of dying. *BMJ, 324*(7342), 905–907.
Claire, S. (2005). Contemporary perspectives. In M. Schwass (Ed.), *Last words: Approaches to death in New Zealand's cultures and faiths* (pp. 41–49). Wellington: Bridgett Williams Books with the Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand.
Cormack, D., & Robson, C. (2010). *Classification and output of multiple ethnicities: issues for monitoring Māori health*. Wellington: Te Rōpū Rangahau Hauora ā Erū Pōmare.
Dein, S. (2006). *Culture and cancer care: Anthropological insights in oncology*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
Dembinsky, M. (2014). Exploring Yamatji perceptions and use of palliative care: An ethnographic study. *International Journal of Palliative Nursing, 20*(8), 387–393.
Dieffenbach, E. (1843). *Travels in New Zealand: With contributions to the geography, botany, and natural history of that country* (Vol. 1). London: John Murray.
Duggleby, W., Kuchera, S., MacLeod, R., et al. (2015). Indigenous people's experiences at the end of life. *Palliative & Supportive Care, 13*(6), 1721–1733.
Dyall, L., Kerse, N., Hayman, K., & And Keeling, S. (2011). Pinnacle of life – Māori living to advanced age. *The New Zealand Medical Journal, 124*(1331), 75–86.
Edge, K. (2017). *Different coloured tears: Bicultural bereavement perspectives.* Doctoral dissertation, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. Retrieved from http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/handle/10289/11163
Frey, R., Gott, M., Raphael, D., et al. (2013). "Where do I go from here"? A cultural perspective on challenges to the use of hospice services. *Health & Social Care in the Community, 21*(5), 519–529.
Gott, M., Williams, L., & Moeke-Maxwell, T. (2014). The paradoxes of 'home' within a palliative care context. In M. Roche et al. (Eds.), *Engaging geographies: Landscapes, lifecourses and mobilities* (pp. 137–157). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Gott, M., Moeke-Maxwell, T., Williams, L., et al. (2015a). Te Pākeketanga: Living and dying in advanced age – A study protocol. *BMC Palliative Care, 14*(74), 21.
Gott, M., Allen, R., Moeke-Maxwell, T., Gardiner, C., & Robinson, J. (2015b). 'No matter what the cost': A qualitative study of the financial costs faced by family and whānau caregivers within a palliative care context. *Palliative Medicine, 29*(6), 518–528.

Gott, M., Frey, R., Wiles, J., et al. (2017). End of life care preferences among people of advanced age: LiLACS NZ. *BMC Palliative Care, 16*(76), 76. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-017-0258-0.

Grennell-Hawke, N., & Tudor, K. (2018). Being Māori and Pākehā: Methodology and method in exploring cultural hybridity. *The Qualitative Report, 23*(7), 1530–1546. Retrieved from https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss7/3.

Hampton, M., Baydala, A., Bourassa, C., et al. (2010). Completing the circle: Elders speak about end-of-life care with aboriginal families in Canada. *Journal of Palliative Care, 26*(1), 6–14.

Hospice New Zealand. (2012). *Hospice New Zealand standards for palliative care*. Welllington: Author.

Johnston Taylor, E., Simmonds, S., Earp, R. And Tibble, P. (2014). Māori perspectives on hospice care. Diversity and Equity in Health Care*,* 11(1), 61–70.

Jones, R. (2012). Rongoā – Medicinal use of plants – The impact of colonisation. *Te Ara – The encyclopedia of New Zealand*. https://teara.govt.nz/en/rongoa-medicinal-use-of-plants

Kelly, L., Linkewich, B., Cromarty, H., et al. (2009). Palliative care of first nations people: A qualitative study of bereaved family members.[Erratum appears in can fam physician. 2009 Jun;*55*(6):590 note: Gilles, Chris [corrected to Giles, Chris]]. *Canadian Family Physician, 55*(4), 394–395.

Kidd, J., Reid, S., Collins, N., et al. (2014). *Kia mau te kahu whakamaru: Health literacy in palliative care*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Koti, D. M. (2013). *Te Tatau o te Pō: Perceptions and experiences of palliative care and hospice – a Māori perspective.* Masters thesis, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand. Retrieved from https://mro.massey.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10179/5462/01_front.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Marsde, M. (2003). *The woven universe: Selected writings of Rev Maori Marsden*. Masterton: Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden.

McGrath, P., & Holewa, H. (2006). *The living model: A resource manual for indigenous palliative care service delivery*. Trivandrum: Researchman.

McLeod, H. (2016). *The need for palliative care in New Zealand. Technical report prepared for the Ministry of Health*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Ministry of Health. (2001). *The New Zealand palliative care strategy*. Wellington: Author.

Moeke-Maxwell, T. (2005). Bi/multiracial Māori women's hybridity in Aotearoa/New Zealand. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 26*(4), 497–510.

Moeke-Maxwell, T., & Nikora, L. W. (2019). Manuake te wairua. Flight of the wairua: Māori end of life preparations. In *Death down under*. Publication pending.

Moeke-Maxwell, T., Nikora, L. W., & Te Awekotuku, N. (2014). End-of-life care and Māori whānau resilience. *Mai Journal, 3*(2), 140–152.

Moeke-Maxwell, T., Nikora, L. W., & Te Awekotuku, N. (2015). Homedeathscapes: Māori end-of-life decision-making processes. In M. Kepa, M. McPherson, & L. Manu'atu (Eds.), *Home: Here to stay*. Wellington: Huia.

Ngata, P. (2005). Death, dying and grief. In M. Schwass (Ed.), *Last words: Approaches to death in New Zealand's cultures and faiths* (pp. 29–41). Wellington: Bridgett Williams Books with the Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand.

Nikora, L. W., & Te Awekotuku, N. (2013). Tangihanga: The ultimate form of Māori cultural expression – an overview of a research program. In M. Agee et al. (Eds.), *Pacific identities and well-being. Cross-cultural perspectives* (pp. 169–173). New York: Routledge.

Oetzel, J., Simpson, M., Berryman, K., & Reddy, R. (2015a). Differences in ideal communication behaviours during end-of-life care for Māori carers/patients and palliative care workers. *Palliative Medicine, 29*(8), 764–766.

Oetzel, J., Simpson, M., Berryman, K., Iti, T. And Reddy, R. (2015b). Managing communication tensions and challenges during the end-of-life journey: Perspectives of Māori kaumātua and their whānau. Health Communication*,* 30(4), 350–360.

Oppenheim, R. S. (1973). *Maori death customs*. Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd.

Penney, L., Fieldhouse, W., & Kerr, S. (2009). *Te Hononga a Te Hekenga o Te Rā: Connections at the going down of the sun: Improving Māori access to palliative care/tapuhi hunga roku in Te Tai Tokerau*. Kerikeri, NZ: Kiwikiwi Research and Evaluation.

Phillipps, W. J. (1954). European influences on tapu and the tangi. *The Journal of Polynesian Society, 63*(3), 147–163.

Reed, A. W. (1963). *An illustrated encyclopedia of Maori life*. Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd.

Reid, P. (2005). Contemporary perspectives. In M. Schwass (Ed.), *Last words: Approaches to death in New Zealand's cultures and faiths* (pp. 41–49). Wellington: Bridgett Williams Books with the Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand.

Reid, P. (2011). Good governance: The case of health equity. In V. Tawhai & K. Gray-Sharp (Eds.), *'Always speaking': The Treaty of Waitangi and public policy*. Wellington: Huia.

Reid, P., & Robson, B. (2007). Understanding health inequalities. In B. Robson & J. Harris (Eds.), *Hauora Māori standards of health IV*. Wellington: Te Rōpu Rangahau Hauora a Eru Pomare.

Saunders, C. M., & Kastenbaum, R. (1997). *Hospice care on the international scene*. New York: Springer.

Statistics New Zealand. (2015). *How is our Māori population changing?*. Retrieved from http://archive.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/maori/maori-population-article-2015.aspx

Te Awekotuku, N. (2007, 16–18 November). *He ngārahu tapu taku ngārahu: forbidden or foreboding? Concerning Tapu and Moko Māori*. Paper presented at the "Taboo": The forbidden/forbidding subject of anthropology – the 32nd annual conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/New Zealand, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Witana, R. (1997). He tikanga tangihanga: Pastoral care in Maori funeral practices. In P. Culbertson (Ed.), *Counselling issues* (pp. 93–106). Auckland: Accent Publications.

Communicating with the Dead in an Australian Aboriginal Culture: The Tiwi from Melville and Bathurst Islands

Eric Venbrux

Abstract The interaction between the living and the dead takes a prominent position in Tiwi society and culture. The dead need the living for a safe passage to the world of the dead, whereas the living need the dead to sustain life. The dead see to it that their descendants are nurtured by their land as well as being protected against illness and bad luck. In spite of various changes and modernization most Tiwi Aborigines continue to consider their attendance of mortuary rites for close relatives as their most important obligation. The spirits of the dead are supposed to be present and to perform the death rites as well. Not only ritual gestures but also song and dance performances entail an interaction between the living and the dead. Mourning songs and the lyrics accompanying dances are made for the occasion. Quite often these songs consist of a dialogue between the performer and the spirit of the dead. Simultaneously, this entails an indirect communication amongst the living in this small-scale, close-knit society, for the dead can make claims and say things that the living would find hard to convey directly due to their many-stranded relations and interdependencies. The significance of the dead in Tiwi society surpasses the importance of the mythological ancestors, which also in part might be explained by the relatively high mortality rate and hence a higher incidence of unfinished business. These concerns are inseparably linked to an ongoing social discourse amongst the living.

Introduction: Necrosociality

Doing anthropological fieldwork in the Swiss mountain village of Bosco Gurin in the mid-1980s, I learned about the close relationships the inhabitants maintained with their dead. In this small-scale, close-knit community the villagers had many-stranded relations, their interdependencies making it difficult to deal with

E. Venbrux (✉)
Centre for Thanatology, Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands
e-mail: e.venbrux@ftr.ru.nl

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_19

disagreements and conflict. What one could not say directly, in this respect, was conveyed indirectly by referring to manifestations of the 'dear souls' in dreams, sights, sounds or other palpable signs (Venbrux 1988). Likewise, the dead figured in an ongoing social discourse amongst the living in an Australian Aboriginal society where I was to do fieldwork next (Venbrux 1993, 1995). In this chapter I focus on the relationship between the living and the dead among the Tiwi Aborigines from Melville and Bathurst Islands in northern Australia.

Following Kim (2016, p. 859n3), I will use the term "necrosociality" to stress "how sociality among the living is inherently intertwined with engagement with the dead." I want to make clear how, in the Tiwi case, necrosociality entails "a relationship of mutual care between the living and the dead" (Walter 2009, p. 216). The dead need the living for a safe passage to the world of the dead, whereas the living need the dead to sustain life. In contrast to Aborigines from the mainland, among the Tiwi humans, dead and alive, are of greater import in ceremonial life than the mythological ancestors (Venbrux 1995, p. 232). In the words of Goodale (2003, p. 150): "In these rituals, the ancestor-creators are not the major focus and are given little attention. Rather, the less remote ancestral beings, the spirits of those who have recently died, are the co-performers at these rituals." What is more, mourning songs are frequently presented as a dialogue between the bereaved and the deceased. The latter's voices happen to be imitated as well as the dead persons' typical phrases and utterances employed by the singers, who also raise the deceased's concerns as imagined or intimated by them (cf. Berndt 1950; Venbrux 1995).

It is not uncommon for mourners to somehow sense the presence of the deceased. Bennett and Bennett, for example, report the following on the way the dead spouse is perceived or experienced by widows in the UK: "At its weakest it is a feeling that one is somehow being watched; at its strongest it is a full-blown sensory experience—olfactory, auditory, visual, and occasionally tactile" (2000, p. 140). My Tiwi interlocutors have told me manifold stories along these lines over the many years of my fieldwork. Their awareness of the presence of the dead, however, went far beyond these experiences related to grief and mourning. The long-dead, for instance, had to be asked for permission and assistance in hunting and gathering. They made their presence felt to the living as well in the foreboding of the death of relatives.

The centrality of death-related behaviour in Tiwi cultural action is evidenced by an extensive ethnographic record dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century (see Venbrux 2017). On top of the cultural salience, the confrontation with death, due to relatively low life expectancy and high mortality rates, happens to be a constant occurrence. "Death rates in the Tiwi community, along with those in Aboriginal people in Arnhem Land, have been the highest in Australia: in the 1990s, with age standardisation, they were six times those of the Australian mainstream" (Hoy et al. 2017, p. 2). It must also be noted that we are dealing with a small-scale society, numbering 2000–2500 people (in the period 1988–2018), in which all are kin or considered as such. The ubiquitous experience of death has impacted Aboriginal communities in Australia considerably (Glaskin et al. 2008), and the Tiwi are no exception.

Palgi and Abramovitch (1984, pp. 404–406) draw attention to a theory by the sociologist Blauner that appears to be relevant here. Blauner (1966) reasons that the greater prominence of the spirits of the dead in indigenous and preindustrial societies has to do with the fact that rather than in old age most people die at an earlier age "with a great deal of unfinished business". In view of the forsaken social obligations, the belief in spirits of the dead allows for a "continuation of relationships broken off in an untimely fashion". Simultaneously, it explains that the spirits of the dead are considered potentially disruptive and dangerous. "The more the newly deceased had been socially involved, the more he needs to be appeased". Tiwi people's ambivalence towards the newly dead find expression in a number of ritual gestures as well as behavioural restrictions or taboos. Before I discuss the relationship between the living and the dead it is necessary to know a little bit more about the Tiwi and their history and lifeworld.

The Tiwi Islands

The Tiwi live in two islands, Melville and Bathurst Islands, off the north Australian coast (see Fig. 1). These islands became isolated from the mainland by the post glacial rise of the sea level between eight and ten thousand years ago. A Tiwi creation myth mentions the earliest known ancestor being followed by water (Nunn and Reid 2016, pp. 28–29). The separation from the mainland for thousands of years

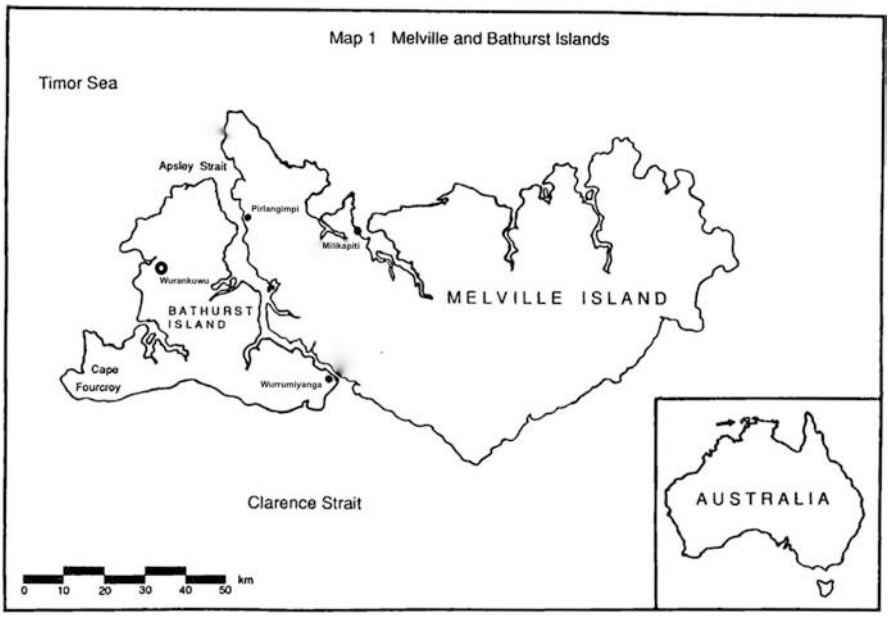


Fig. 1 Map of the Melville and Bathurst Islands, North Australia

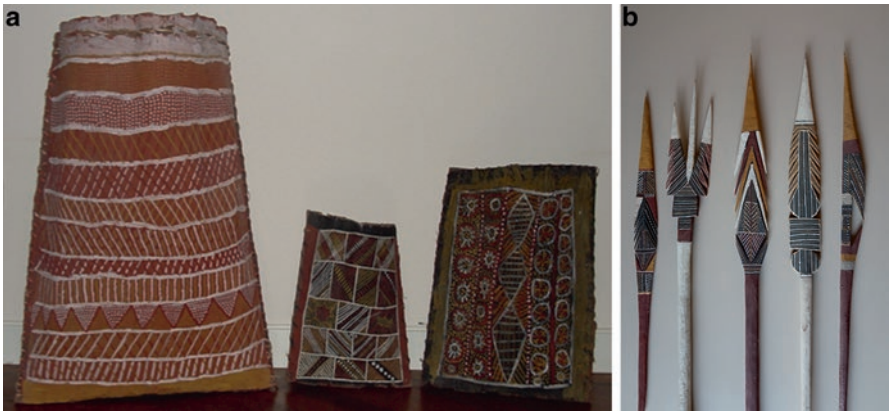


Fig. 2 a) Ceremonial bark baskets, and b) barbed spears. (Photographs: Eric Venbrux)

would explain Tiwi people's distinctive language and culture. A special form of cultural expression concerns the abstract and geometrical visual art of the Tiwi. These polychrome paintings not only adorned human bodies in ceremony, but also artefacts, such as carved grave posts, bark baskets and long barbed spears (Fig. 2).

The Tiwi lived a semi-nomadic life in their tropical islands. They camped as extended families in the form of polygynous households, up to thirty to fifty people in size, dispersed over the islands. The action radius was more restricted in the wet season than in the dry season when the tall grass had been burnt down. There appears to have been an abundance of bush and sea food. Conflict resolution took place by means of staged spear duels. These mostly were without lethal consequences in contrast to the Tiwi institution of sneak attacks, involving the forementioned barbed spears (Hart and Pilling 1960, pp. 80–87; Venbrux 1995). In a sample of 21 mobile forager band societies, more than half of the total number of killings took place among the Tiwi alone (Fry and Söderberg 2013, p. 271). The most common premonition of death, still today, is the vision of the spirit of a dead father or grandfather, painted all in white and holding a barbed spear.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, these spears became less effective in the confrontation with firearms from a troupe of hunters from the mainland. Furthermore, in December 1912, an epidemic broke out at a ceremonial gathering near a newly established Roman Catholic mission post on Bathurst Island. Within a fortnight, the disease wiped out more than a quarter of the Tiwi population (Venbrux 2008). Up to that point in time, the Tiwi had been "the one tribe which offered consistent, uncompromising resistance to European intrusion" (Reid 1990: 97). The Tiwi became subject to the Pax Australiana and the institution of outright killings went underground. The Bathurst Island mission post gradually developed into the largest Tiwi township, called Nguiu and since 2004 renamed Wurrumiyanga. On Melville Island there are two smaller townships, namely Pirlangimpi (Garden Point) and Milikapiti (Snake Bay). Pirlangimpi began as a government ration depot in 1937. It subsequently became a so-called half-caste mission (in which children of mixed descent, taken

Fig. 3 The grave of Justin Puruntatameri surrounded by carved and painted grave posts in 2016. The grave posts indicate that Tiwi postfuneral rituals have taken place. Placing artificial flowers and cementing the grave are fairly recent practices as is erecting a headstone with a plaque. The wooden cross bears testimony to the presence of Roman Catholic missionaries in the islands. (Photograph: Justin Venbrux)

away from their Aboriginal mothers, were put) until 1968, when the government took over again. Milikapiti has its origins as a township in a World War II settlement, established in 1941, and likewise was run by the government. In 1977, after the passing of the land rights act, the Tiwi received ownership rights of their islands. Finally, Wurankuwu (Rangku), a small township on Bathurst Island, was set up in 1993 (Venbrux 1998). Tiwi society has undergone dramatic changes since the beginning of the twentieth century, although — despite the impact of the Catholic missions and incorporation into the Australian nation-state — in many areas the Tiwi have adapted and retained their own value system (Venbrux 1995, 2000) (Fig. 3).

Mopadruwi: The Spirits of the Dead

In Tiwi understandings people pass through three stages, namely those of the unborn, the living and the dead. A conventional image of the unborn (*putaputuwi*) is their appearance in a dream of the future father (or grandfather). In the dream the spirit children spear their sleeping father in the heart. This scene of spiritual conception is reenacted in the mortuary rituals. In the postfuneral rites the mother (or mother's brother) dances having contractions and giving birth. The newborn child belongs to the living (*tiwi*). The living person has a spirit or ghost (*imanka*) that might wander

off during sleep but returns. Death occurs when the spirit doesn't return, is taken away by the spirit of a dead (grand) father, and joins the spirits of the dead (*mopa-druwi*). Next, the Tiwi death rites stress the separation from the living and guide the spirit of the deceased from the world of the living to the world of the dead.

When Tiwi people were told by the early missionaries that the soul or spirit went up to heaven after death, they strongly disagreed: rather than going up into the air, the spirit walked to where the grandparents "lived", that is, their locations of burial. These places are focal points for the patrilineal descendants of an influential man, who form a "one-grandfather-group" (*aminiyarti*). Such a group has a solidarity of its own; the members support each other in fights and have territorial rights in the area (Hart 1930a, p. 174; Venbrux 1995, p. 24). As the grandfather's brothers are regarded as grandfathers as well in the Tiwi kinship system, the descendants can refer to multiple burial places in the islands. One senior man with a number of father's fathers explained to me: "When we die, we ask spirit to go to their country. When I die, my spirit has to go to Waru, Maranga, Rangini, Loparnappi […] where *amenei* [grandfather] lives [is buried]". The place names are called out in the mortuary rites for a deceased member of the group. The loss of this person is expressed by the surviving members as the loss or injury of a part of their body, namely half of their face. The other part of the face is found back again or healed at the grave of the grandfather. The solidarity happens to be further expressed in the substitution of the names of (late) cousins with the same parental grandparent (*mutuni*) for the temporarily tabooed name of the deceased in songs in the postfuneral rites.

The spirits of the dead "live in self-contained communities" (Mountford 1958, p. 61); they "form social groups just as the living do" (Goodale 1971, p. 237). The spirits hunt and gather in their territory. They also appear to have the same sentiments as the living and might, for example, feel jealous or lonely. Goodale (1971, pp. 239-240) reports on testimonies by Tiwi persons of their abduction by a spirit of the dead. Although I did not come across such tales, I heard about attempts (e.g., the mark of the hand of a deceased child on one's back), visitations, appearance in dreams, presence nearby and lethal intervention. I was also told of a case of an abduction by a small spirit, called *pemenua*, in which the victim's two wives took a number of measures that chased the spirit away and brought back their husband. The measures—washing with salt water, making light with a fire and using mirrors—happened also to be employed to ward off the spirits of the dead. This was the case when an old man who lived alone had died. During the night a big fire was kept burning and my Tiwi father-in-law placed a mirror behind his head where he was lying down to sleep. As a ritual worker I had helped to lay the man in state and to tie his limbs together with a rope as it was feared his lonely spirit might bother the living.

This man had earlier told me about two neighbours, who subsequently had experienced a violent death in previous months. It was strange there, he said, pointing to the hut where the couple used to live. In the evening he heard the door banging. He went to look but saw nothing and considered it strange. His dogs protected him, so he was not afraid of getting hurt. Holding up two fingers, he said there were two spirits: the dead man and his wife. Early in the morning he heard her chopping firewood. He pointed to two pieces of firewood as the place where the two spirits of the dead made fire. I noticed it had been a fire without leaving visible ashes.

When widowed, the male neighbour had looked after the single, old man. He worried about him as his condition deteriorated. A medical plane took the man to hospital on the mainland. Consequently, the neighbour told me in the morning, he had not slept very well. All of a sudden, he felt a cold breeze. He heard something at his window. He woke up. It had been a *mopaditi*, a spirit of the dead. At noon I encountered him again. The man said that he was still frightened of the spirit: "I feel funny, it makes me nervous". He had never experienced this before. The spirit "was staring at me", he related, adding that he had clearly sensed it. On his request I replaced the light bulb on the verandah of his little hut (to ascertain there was protective light). Three nights later he met his death.

During my fieldwork a fatal car accident, involving only one car, occurred in the environs of a burial place. The widower of a woman recently buried there was adamant the spirit of her dead father, painted up and holding a spear, had been standing in the road and was the cause of the accident. The driver should have stayed out of the tabooed area. The widower further told me about a close friend who the previous year died in another accident with a car. Again, only one car was involved. The friend and his companions had been drinking. The widower believed they had been distracted by the whistle of a spirit of the dead. Therefore, they failed to pay proper attention to the road and crashed. "That's why I tell people never to look when they hear a whistle (from the bush)".

The spirits of the dead, however, could also have a beneficial effect. The spirit of a deceased grandmother, for example, was called for when one evening we drifted out to sea with a broken outboard motor while it was getting dark and a rainstorm was coming. The grandchildren were instructed by their mother and grandfather to call out for help (*maningoa, kapalla*) to the spirit of their grandmother buried behind the mangroves bordering the coast, whereupon the outboard motor started working again and we got home safely. Due to the special solidarity, the grandchildren could most profitably appeal to this particular spirit of the dead. Tiwi people also used to call out to the spirits of the dead for their assistance in obtaining food.

Entering the area, they make themselves known to the spirits. Tiwi people say who they are (in terms of kin relationship to the dead) and what they come for. "You ask also, if you go hunting, if they allow you to have some food or help you to get some", said a senior woman. "Then it is alright." She further noted that one can feel the spirits' presence. This is the general procedure. Likewise, when visiting or coming across graves, Tiwi people tend to clear the grass and herbage from them. The gesture can be interpreted as an expression of care. The reciprocal act is also expected. Relatives can declare to the spirits of the dead at an old grave site that they are hungry. The latter "should then bring food close so people can find it easily" (Goodale 2003, p. 155). Sand taken from the grave is believed to bring luck in cards, which is another example of the care of the dead for the living. The death rites are important occasions when the dead and the living interact. Actually, the songs and sorrow are conceived of as gifts for the dead. One of the most important things the living can do for their newly dead is to grant their spirits a safe passage to the world of the dead.

Ritual Dealings with the Spirits of the Dead

The vision of the spirit of the dead (grand) father, painted up with white clay and holding a spear, is a conventional premonition of death. A man told me he knew his widowed sister was to die that day: "I was awake at five o'clock this morning. I saw my father painted up [for ceremony] and also my sister's husband." Not only the dying but also their close relatives might have such an apparition. At the deathbed of the single old man, mentioned earlier, senior men regularly checked on his pulse that gradually fell away. One of the men told me that spirits of his dead relatives had now come. Another one started singing, urging the visiting spirits to take the new one with them.

Upon death, the name of the deceased, and the objects, places and people the dead person was in close touch with, become taboo (*pukamani*) (Hart 1930b; Goodale 1971; Venbrux 1995). The related practices of avoidance promote a tie-breaking with the deceased. Traditionally, the bereaved's close relatives were not allowed to eat and drink themselves, but had to be fed and be given drink by other ones (Fig. 4). The spirit of the dead might give one a sore throat, although the practice of giving the main mourners something to drink might also be related to a dry throat as a physical effect of grief. What is more, many of the bereaved express feeling pain or being injured at places on the body that indicate their relationship to the deceased (Venbrux 2017). When coming with the corpse to the burial place people

Fig. 4 Paddy Freddie Puruntatameri gives his wife Rachel, a daughter of the deceased, a drink at the time of the postfuneral rituals for her father in Melville Island in August 1989. They adhere to the mourning taboo, according to which bereaved persons are not allowed to eat and drink themselves. (Photograph: Eric Venbrux)

call out to relevant spirits of the dead to announce the new arrival. At the conclusion of the burial, some of the mourners tend to step over the grave mound so that the spirit of the dead will not follow them.

Postfuneral rites take place after at least a few months. The rites vary in duration, number and elaboration. They are comprised of a series of small, intermediary rites and a larger final ceremony, concluded with the erection of carved and painted posts around the grave. The purpose of the ritual drama is thus to direct the spirit of the dead from the world of the living to the world of the dead. Ideally, the rites start in the localities of the living and with intervals go on in space and time until the beginning of the final rite at the burial place, an area reserved for the spirits of the dead.

As the close relatives are subject to mourning taboos, they depend on more distant in-laws to perform a number of ritual tasks (Hart and Pilling 1960, pp. 91–93), such as handling the corpse, preparing the dance grounds and carving and painting the grave posts.

The ritual workers cut the tree trunks for the posts in the territory of the deceased. This area is tabooed as is the burial place within it, reserved for the spirit of the dead as a terrain for foraging. Until the second half of the twentieth century, when the workers came back to the community of the living a ritual fight used to be staged to chase the spirits of the dead away (Mountford 1958, p. 72n63). Mountford (1958, p. 92) argues that the polychrome body paintings of the main mourners in the postfuneral rites serve to disguise themselves from the spirit of the dead (see also Goodale 1959, p. 9 and 2003, p. 162). In the dance-cum-song ceremonies the ritual workers keep the spirits of the dead, who are deemed to be jealous, at bay by employing a flat, fish-shaped club, called *aruwalla* (Fig. 5). They also use fires for the ritual cleansing of the participants and for closing in the new spirit of the dead.

Spencer (1914, p. 239) observed that "it is evident that the whole ceremony is carried out with the object of pleasing the spirit of the dead person and also, at the same time, of intimating to it the fact that they expect it to remain quiet and not trouble them." The postfuneral rites start with a dance in which the performers stamp their feet hard on the ground to draw the attention of the spirit of the deceased. The people who attend the intermediary rituals face in the direction of the burial place of the deceased. In addition, a goose-feather ball on a cord can be softly thrown in an arc three times in the direction of the spirit's destination. The spirits of the dead are supposed to be present and to perform the ceremony as well. Not only ritual gestures but also song and dance performances entail an interaction between the living and the dead.

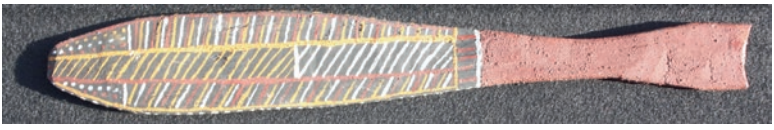


Fig. 5 Aruwalla, fish-shaped club to chase the spirits of the dead away, made by Romuald Puruntatameri. (Photograph: Eric Venbrux)

Fig. 6 Milareiutumau dances for a deceased classificatory daughter whose spirit is throwing sand at her. (Photograph: Eric Venbrux)

For example, in a dance a woman made it look as if the spirit of her deceased classificatory daughter threw dirt at her (Fig. 6). It reenacted a gesture by three to four year old Tiwi children, who when starting to walk tend to throw dirt at their parents. Up until that point in time, they have been carried around, as with snakes and so forth it is too dangerous for them to crawl. The gesture indicates they distance themselves from their parents and is taken up as a potent symbol in the mortuary rites. It suggests the departure of the new spirit of the dead.

Mourning songs and the lyrics accompanying dances are made for the occasion. Quite often these songs consist of a dialogue between the performer and the spirit of the dead. For instance, a widow passing a place that reminded her of her husband, who had recently died, sang with his voice: "[Dead man saying:] Well, maybe my wife is coming/I sit down at the beach and watch her coming/[Dead man telling his fellow dead relatives:] Well, I'm leaving, because I've got to meet my wife." Another example is a man whose sister married the deceased but the latter had not taken care that his clan gave a marriage partner in return. Brothers-in-law have a joking relationship, exchanging swearing words. The singer alludes to the deceased's indebtedness to him: "[Dead man saying:] I thought that is my brother-in-law, and he is jealous of me in the night/Maybe your kids, they might be ashamed of me swearing at you." Many more examples could be given that show that the agency attributed to the newly dead, particularly the verbal statements voiced, are linked to an ongoing social discourse.

Before the final dance the main mourners used to disguise themselves from the spirit of the dead by painting their bodies with polychrome designs (Fig. 7). Similar designs can be found at the carved grave posts that are erected around the grave. It

Fig. 7 Tractor Joe disguised from the spirit of the dead. (Photograph: Eric Venbrux)

seems as if the idea is to confuse the spirits of the dead as the living will depart while the sculptured and painted posts stay put. Like the performances and expressions of sorrow, the grave posts are also considered "gifts to the dead" (Hoff 1988). The area will no longer be taboo. The hard-wooden posts stand as markers of the territorial rights of the descendants of the deceased.

Change and Resilience

Tiwi society, as mentioned, underwent dramatic changes since the beginning of the twentieth century. Missionisation and incorporation into the Australian nation-state did have an impact on the local way of life, but least so on the traditional beliefs and practices related to death. There has been a remarkable cultural resilience in spite of attempts to eradicate those beliefs and practices. Still in 1969 the Roman Catholic Mission, then active in the islands for more than half a century, issued certificates to be undersigned by the newly bereaved that forbade "pagan-type" ceremonies after the burial of their deceased close relatives (Venbrux 2000, p. 68). Around that time, the priest who was superintendent of the church-run settlement on Bathurst Island also sought to enforce monogamy by means of certificates. While nominal

monogamy became the norm in the islands, the "pagan" rituals were still performed in the bush and elsewhere out of the bounds of the Bathurst Island Mission.

In the geographically most distant township of Milikapiti (on Melville Island), established by the government, "even today Christian influence is minimal" (Goodale 2003, p. 151). The third township, Pirlangimpi, has been run by the government, the mission and the government again until the Tiwi received land rights and a certain measure of autonomy in 1977. The lead up to this development coincided with a cultural renaissance in which the mortuary rituals after being affected by the suppression were performed again in greater elaboration. On request of a Tiwi family in Milikapiti, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies produced two ethnographic films of the traditional death rites (Venbrux 2018, p. 61). In the 1980s the mission reconsidered its stance on Tiwi practices and beliefs, no longer condemning them but seeking to reconcile indigenous culture and spirituality with the Christian message. Ironically, the priest who in the late 1960s issued the certificates, marked with Tiwi people's fingerprints in ink and contra-signed by him, to combat "paganism" returned in 1986 to implement a new missionary strategy of "inculturation". During a 2 year sojourn in Pirlangimpi on Melville Island he frequented the mortuary rituals previously forbidden by him. He even reprimanded elderly Tiwi men for not taking better care of their ceremonies, telling them they might lose their culture.

How different had he responded to the postfuneral rites for Minapini, a man who took pride in being a pagan and called himself *mobaditi*, meaning "spirit of the dead", many years before? It happened on a Sunday when his Mass was barely attended but the noises of a big Tiwi ceremony on Melville Island could be heard across the sea strait at the Bathurst Island Mission. The priest crossed the strait in a dinghy with an outboard motor. He told the participants in the death rites off and pushed the grave posts, erected around the grave, over. "Such a pagan symbol deserved shaking, just as they all did!", the priest later noted with regret (Fallon 1991, p. 13). Tiwi people, including the dead man's son, had warned him.

A senior man, the undisputed ritual leader of Melville Island, told me that he nearly speared the priest in his anger. When the priest left in his dinghy on this way back to the mission across the sea strait the motor exploded and was never to be found again. The Tiwi men who had to dive for the motor gave up after the dead man's spirit appeared to my informant in a dream. The spirit told him that he had taken the motor with him in the grave (Venbrux 2000, p. 67). The priest later related he had forgotten but was reminded of his knocking over of the carved and painted posts at Minapini's grave by the latter's son. In the priest's version of the aftermath, however, it occurred after a fortnight that he "lost a brand new Mercury 25HP outboard motor, over the side of the boat, never to be retrieved" (Fallon 1991, p. 14). The priest, who also used to refuse holy communion to people who participated in the "pagan" ceremonies, however, was converted by the actions of the spirit to Tiwi ways, according to present-day Tiwi Catholics (Rademaker 2019, pp. 108–112).

Rademaker (2019) argues on the basis of interviews that in Tiwi perception the missionaries have been converted by them rather than the other way around. The Catholic brother who served as the mission's historian failed to grasp this. With

regard to the crucial year in which the Tiwi received land rights and were liberated from repressive missionary supervision, he notes, "in 1976 we find that the cross has replaced the totem pole, not only on their graves but also in their way of life" (Pye 1985, p. 61). A Catholic sister, who worked with the priest mentioned above on the first attempts at inculturation, told me they had come to realise that the Catholic faith had "not really hit their heart" (Venbrux 2000, p. 74). In an attempt to capture Tiwi people's spirituality, the missionaries changed their policy and allowed Tiwi death rites to be performed and grave posts to be placed at graves in the Catholic burial places (see Fig. 3).

Probably they also sought to undo a split in the Tiwi population, dating back to the 1940s, between those who embraced Catholicism and a shrinking group of pagans. The leader of the last group, Minapini, resisted the priest who wanted to baptise him, saying "I want to go to hell". Kantilla, his adversary, became a Catholic and was buried in the Catholic graveyard of the Bathurst Island Mission (Venbrux 1995, pp. 61–62). Minapini, who had a reputation as a "murderman" (*kwampini*), because he had killed four people in an ambush, was buried out bush at Pawularitarra on Melville Island. This location happened to be near a bush camp where Tiwi people lived until the early 1970s. When Justin Puruntatameri (see Fig. 3) lived there, so he told me, he had seen Minapini's spirit sitting at the well one night. We returned there for the burial of Minapini's son, who had become a victim of homicide.

On 3 November 1988 a few remaining mortuary posts of Minapini's grave were still visible, as was an enamel dish left atop the grave mound. In the past Tiwi left food and water at the grave for the spirit of the dead (Goodale 1971, p. 237, p. 252). Kantilla's son led the mortuary rituals of the people from Bathurst Island for Minapini's son, including the final postfuneral rites performed alongside the ones of the Melville Islanders at Pawularitarra.

The ritual leader from Bathurst Island told me that he adhered to both Tiwi Law (cosmology) and Catholic law. He did not see any contradiction. He devoted a three-day yam ritual, sponsored by the Catholic mission, to Minapini's son (Venbrux 2000, p. 75). On 18 May 1989 he stamped his feet on the shore of Bathurst Island. He faced the grave of Minapini's son behind the moonlit mangroves on the other side of the sea strait. Kantilla's son was "awakening" the spirit of the dead man, telling him to come and listen (see Fig. 8). The first night of this ritual is the night of sorrow, when songs of grief and grievances, composed for the occasion, are performed. As mentioned, the mourning songs often entail a dialogue between the singer and the spirit of the dead.

In August 1989, 10 months after his death, the final postfuneral rites took place for Minapini's son at Pawularitarra (see Fig. 9). During the night the fires were kept burning high out of fear for the spirits of the dead. Performers used the voice of the deceased to bring out arguments and grievances in their songs (see Venbrux 1995, pp. 183–222). Some 800 people had come to watch the *iloti* or concluding ceremony. Actually, the Melville Islanders and the Bathurst Islanders simultaneously held cleansing, intermediary and concluding mortuary rites at their own dancing grounds within close distance. During a break a mass was said by a priest under a shade of the Bathurst Island group, but this was only attended by a handful of peo-

Fig. 8 Bertram Kantilla calls out for the spirit of the dead to come and listen. (Photograph: Eric Venbrux)

Fig. 9 A daughter of the deceased, supported by sisters, performs a dance of the spirit (*imanka*) in a postfuneral ritual at the grave. (Photograph: Eric Venbrux)

ple. An old man, who had had a fight with the deceased on the eve of the latter's death, put a wallet with 160 Australian dollars in a plastic bag on top of the shade of the Melville Island group. When it was time to pay the ritual workers, he found his contribution had gone missing. He grabbed a spear and made allegations of theft. Another old man was convinced that the spirit of Minapini had taken the money: "He make 'em settle that." A death anniversary for Minapini's son to lift the taboos on his names and photographs depicting him took place on 29 October 1991, three years after his death. This new type of celebration involved a mass said by the deacon and the immediate family of the deceased shouting beer in the Social Club (or beer canteen) in exchange for people dancing and performing mourning songs.

Due to modern means of communication and transport Tiwi funerals did become larger than ever before. The availability of metal tools allowed for larger, more and more spectacular carved grave posts (West 2017, p. 115). The scheduling of postfuneral rituals has been adjusted to the modern rhythm of life, with the grand final ritual mostly in the weekend. People tend to have greater choice whether to stick to more or less strict mourning taboos. Valuable objects such as houses, cars and dinghies can be ritually cleansed, whereas most other personal belongings of the deceased will be destroyed (Venbrux 2018). Yet, sometimes the closely bereaved avoid the place of death, even a health clinic or a brand-new house, at all costs for a considerable time. In spite of all changes and modernization most Tiwi continue to consider their attendance at mortuary rites for close relatives as their most important obligation. The word of the dead, as Robinson (1997, 313) makes clear, is still of great significance in crucial life-decisions. The living and the dead maintain a relationship of mutual care.

Final Remarks

Communication between the living and the dead is not unique to the Tiwi (e.g., Lohmann 2005; Stewart and Strathern 2005; Telban and Vávrová 2014). It is also known in Western societies in past and present (e.g., Geary 1994; Johnston 1999; Huberman 2017; Badone 2018). Yet, the interaction between the living and the dead takes a quite prominent position in Tiwi society and culture. In contrast to Aborigines from the mainland, what Tiwi dreamers experienced was "most likely to be the spirit of deceased relative, not the remote ancestors" (Goodale 2003, p. 151). As we have seen, the communication between the living and the dead runs as a red thread through their cycle of mortuary rituals. One could call it "necrosociality" in terms of mutual care and this goes beyond the death rites.

The relatively high mortality rate, and hence a higher incidence of unfinished business as Blauner suggested, might in part explain the prominence and import of the spirits of the dead. Between 1986 and 2010 there was a wave of suicides of Tiwi youths of whom many had visions of related spirits of the dead (Robinson 1990; Scott-Clark and Levy 2006; Hoy et al. 2017). A Tiwi woman told me how she

sensed the presence of Minapini's four victims of an ambush in the beginning of the twentieth century: "The spirits of those four men are still there at Banjo Beach. They are completely painted up. They stay in the mangrove (swamps) there. Some people have seen them, all painted up, there at the beach. I have never seen them, but you can feel … feel someone staring at you. I don't know, you feel funny." Elsewhere I have described how a homicide case re-energized the mortuary rituals (see Venbrux 1995). Several of the examples of spirits of the dead, mentioned here, calling for attention of the living concern cases of untimely and/or violent death. More generally speaking, however, the significance of the dead in Tiwi society surpasses the importance of the mythological ancestors. Whereas the living care for the dead and guide their transition from the world of the living to the world of the dead, the dead see to it that their descendants are nurtured by their land as well as being protected against illness and bad luck.

References

Badone, E. (2018). After-death communications: Signs from the other world in contemporary North America. In A. C. G. M. Robben (Ed.), *A companion to the anthropology of death* (pp. 293–305). Hoboken: Wiley.

Bennett, G., & Bennett, K. M. (2000). The presence of the dead: An empirical study. *Mortality, 5*(2), 139–157.

Berndt, C. (1950). Expressions of grief among Aboriginal women. *Oceania, 20*(4), 286–332.

Blauner, R. (1966). Death and social structure. *Psychiatry, 29*(4), 378–394.

Fallon, J. (1991). The good old days. *Nelen Yubu* (periodical of the Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit), Spring 1991, *48*, 12–16.

Fry, D. P., & Söderberg, P. (2013). Lethal aggression in mobile forager bands and implications for the origins of war. *Science, 341*(6143), 270–273.

Geary, P. (1994). *Living with the dead in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Glaskin, K., Tonkinson, M., Musharbash, Y., & Burbank, V. (Eds.). (2008). *Mortality, mourning and mortuary practices in indigenous Australia*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Goodale, J. C. (1959). The Tiwi dance for the dead. *Expedition, 2*(1), 2–13.

Goodale, J. C. (1971). *Tiwi wives: A study of the women from Melville Island, North Australia*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Goodale, J. C. (2003). Tiwi Island dreams. In R. I. Lohmann (Ed.), *Dream travelers: Sleep experiences and culture in the Western Pacific* (pp. 150–167). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hart, C. W. M. (1930a). The Tiwi of Melville and Bathurst Islands. *Oceania, 1*(2), 167–180.

Hart, C. W. M. (1930b). Personal names among the Tiwi. *Oceania, 1*(3), 280–290.

Hart, C. W. M., & Pilling, A. R. (1960). *The Tiwi of North Australia*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Hoff, J. (1988). *Gifts for the dead: A stylistic analysis of Tiwi graveposts illuminated by a case study of their manufacture*. 2 vols. PhD thesis, Australian National University, Canberra.

Hoy, W. E., Mott, S. A., & McLeod, B. J. (2017). Transformation of mortality in a remote Australian Aboriginal community: A retrospective observational study. *BMJ Open, 7*, e016094. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2017–016094.

Huberman, J. (2017). Dearly departed: Communication with the dead in the digital age. *Social Analysis, 61*(3), 91–107.

Johnston, S. I. (1999). *Restless dead: Encounters between the living and the dead in ancient Greece*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kim, J. (2016). Necrosociality: isolated death and unclaimed cremains in Japan. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 22*, 843–863.
Lohmann, R. I. (2005). The afterlife of Asabano corpses: Relationships with the deceased in Papua New Guinea. *Ethnology, 44*(2), 189–206.
Mountford, C. P. (1958). *The Tiwi, their art, myth and ceremony*. London: Phoenix House.
Nunn, P. D., & Reid, N. J. (2016). Aboriginal memories of inundation of the Australian coast dating from more than 7000 years ago. *Australian Geographer, 47*(1), 11–47.
Palgi, P., & Abramovitch, H. (1984). Death: A cross-cultural perspective. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 13*, 385–417.
Pye, J. (1985). *The Tiwi Islands*. Darwin: Catholic Mission Headquarters.
Rademaker, L. (2019). Going native: Converting narratives in Tiwi histories of twentieth-century missions. *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, *70*(1), 98–118.
Reid, G. (1990). *A picnic with the natives: Aboriginal-European relations in the Northern Territory to 1910*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
Robinson, G. (1990). Separation, retaliation and suicide: Mourning and the conflicts of young Tiwi men. *Oceania, 60*(3), 161–178.
Robinson, G. (1997). Families, generations and the self: Conflict, loyalty, and recognition in an Australian Aboriginal society. *Ethos, 25*(3), 303–332.
Scott-Clark, C., & Levy, A. (2006). The land of the dead: How did two tiny islands off Australia's coast come to have the highest suicide rate in the world? *The Guardian*, 24 June 2006. Online: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jun/24/australia.adrianlevy
Spencer, W. B. (1914). *The native tribes of the Northern Territory*. London: Macmillan.
Stewart, P., & Strathern, A. (2005). Cosmology, resources, and landscape: Agencies of the dead and the living in Duna, Papua New Guinea. *Ethnology, 44*(1), 35–47.
Telban, B., & Vávrová, D. (2014). Ringing the living and the dead: Mobile phones in a Sepik society. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology, 25*(2), 223–238.
Venbrux, E. (1988). *Een bruid in het graf. Een antropologisch onderzoek naar voorstellingen rond de dood in een Zwitsers bergdorp*. Nijmegen: ICSA.
Venbrux, E. (1993). Les politiques de l'émotion dans le rituel funéraire des Tiwi d'Australie. *L'Ethnographie, 89*(1), 61–77.
Venbrux, E. (1995). *A death in the Tiwi Islands: Conflict, ritual and social life in an Australian Aboriginal community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Venbrux, E. (1998). Why do the Tiwi want a new township? In V. Keck (Ed.), *Common worlds and single lives: Constituting knowledge in Pacific societies* (pp. 329–352). Oxford: Berg.
Venbrux, E. (2000). Cross with the totem pole: Tiwi material culture in missionary discourse and practice. In A. Borsboom & J. Kommers (Eds.), *Anthropologists and the missionary endeavour* (pp. 59–80). Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik.
Venbrux, E. (2008). Indigenous religion in an intercultural space. In L. Zimmer-Tamakoshi & J. Dickerson-Putnam (Eds.), *Pulling the right threads: The ethnographic life and legacy of Jane C. Goodale* (pp. 168–186). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
Venbrux, E. (2017). How the Tiwi construct the deceased's postself in mortuary ritual. *Anthropological Forum, 27*(1), 49–62.
Venbrux, E. (2018). Destroying objects, keeping memories. In Z. Newby & R. Toulson (Eds.), *The materiality of mourning: Cross-disciplinary perspectives* (pp. 61–74). London: Routledge.
Walter, T. (2009). Communicating with the dead. In C. D. Bryant & D. L. Peck (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of death and the human experience* (Vol. 1, pp. 216–219). Los Angeles: Sage.
West, M. (2017). Sorrow and celebration: The material items of the Tiwi. In K. Aigner (Ed.), *Australia: The vatican museums indigenous collection* (pp. 146–159). Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press/Vatican City: Edizioni Musei Vaticani.

Death and Dying in American Indian Cultures

Andrea C. Walker

What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in the winter time.
It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset.
–Crowfoot (Blackfoot; see Exley 1997, p. 9)

Abstract The experience of loss and death of traditions, family, language, culture, trust, hope, and life itself has been so familiar for American Indian populations that it has characterized these groups throughout recent centuries. Yet in the midst of this, American Indians have coped and are now forming new characterizations marked by the experience of restoration and rebirth. This chapter discusses the role of historical events in the development of the traumatic nature of death often experienced in the present for American Indians. The author reviews literature related to bereavement rituals, grieving, spirituality, and meaning of death for all groups in this population and presents (a) highlights of a past study conducted with individuals in the Muscogee Creek tribe (see Walker AC, Death Stud 32:123–141, 2008; Walker AC, Death Stud 59(4):351–367, 2009; Walker AC, Balk DE, Death Stud 31:633–652, 2007; Walker AC, Thompson T, Omega 59(2):129–146, 2009) and (b) preliminary data from interviews recently conducted with individuals associated with the Lakota Tribe. Given the vast diversity within the individuals, families, and circumstances around death experienced by the 573 federally recognized tribes, we must recognize that any generalizations made should be done with caution. The chapter addresses briefly the interplay of rituals and beliefs with historical trauma and concludes with what death means for some American Indians.

A. C. Walker (✉)
Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK, USA
e-mail: awalker@oru.edu

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_20

Keywords American Indian · Native American · Death · Dying · Bereavement · Grief · Spirituality · Meaning of death

American Indians are not strangers to death and dying. The experience of loss and death of traditions, family, language, culture, trust, hope, and life has been so familiar that it has characterized these groups throughout recent centuries. Yet in the midst of this, American Indians have coped. Resources of community and spirituality have expanded, and the challenges of a changing context have been met with courage, creativity, and a deepened focus on improving life, both now and in the afterlife. The tide is turning, and American Indians are now forming new characterizations marked by the experience of restoration and rebirth. The unequivocal challenges these populations have faced along with the thoughtful and adaptive planning and intention for coping with these losses, place American Indian groups into a unique position of knowledge and wisdom about death, dying, and transition. We begin with a discussion of the historical and current social context in which the experience of loss is embedded, and move to a review of literature regarding current death rituals and beliefs, including how these impact grieving and the meaning associated with death itself. We end with a brief discussion of how rituals and beliefs inform and impact the historical trauma these groups have experienced. It is in the spirit of great respect and reverence, for both these groups' historical suffering and resilience that this chapter is written.

Sociohistorical Context of Loss and Resilience: Past and Present

Historical Events

The history of American Indians in the context of a growing United States has been tumultuous at best. We highlight only a few key events here (see Thornton 1990, for a more detailed account). After centuries of conflict with settlers moving into their lands, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 required that several tribes in the southeastern regions of the U. S. be given the choice to assimilate to the mainstream society, based on Western values, or undergo forced removal and relocation to Indian Territory, which is now the state of Oklahoma. Thousands of individuals died along the resulting Trail of Tears, and upon arrival in the new lands, those surviving did not receive all of the resources promised to them by the U. S. government. Simultaneously, other tribes in the northern regions of the current United States were facing ongoing conflict with settlers (Bowman 2016). Treaties between these tribes and the U. S. government were reached, beginning in 1851, but were continually violated as more settlers moved in and as natural resources were discovered in reserved lands. After numerous battles and loss of lives, these tribal members were

ultimately forced to live on smaller reservations, where many have resided for more than 100 years (Bowman 2016). Following these changes, the U. S. government forced American Indians in many regions to attend boarding schools and convert to some form of Christianity, denying their rights to speak their Native languages and practice their own spiritual traditions. Some have reported being shamed for being American Indian, and many hid their true Native identities to circumvent societal discrimination. One Muscogee Creek (56-year-old woman) said, "When I grew up, we were embarrassed to be Indian. (My) great-grandmother didn't claim to be Indian because we were treated second-class. So our rituals were underground… because of European influence. They didn't understand us, and they misinterpreted us" (Walker 2009, p. 352). American Indians have continued to suffer the consequences of this ongoing struggle.

Strands of Resilience

In recent years, there has been a resurgence in American Indian groups and re-establishment of cultural, familial, and spiritual traditions that had seemingly been lost (Grandbois and Sanders 2009; Jilek 1978; Walker and Balk 2007; Weaver and White 1997). Thornton (1990) wrote about this trend in his historical account of American Indian population and cultural identity for the past 500 years. For instance, during the late 1800s, Sun Dances of the Great Plains Indians were outlawed for some time, but now they are practiced even more often than their traditional frequency of once per year (R. Bradford 2018, personal communications). Higher education programs focusing on Native history, culture, language, and tribal affairs, have developed in institutions such as the Indian University of North America and College of the Muscogee Nation (Walker and Balk 2007). Cultural events and ceremonies have been revived, powwows have been designed to include and invite public participation, and in some tribes, services have been made available to the greater, non-Indian, communities. In the face of conflicts with mainstream society, such as the recent protest of the Dakota Access Pipeline being built through sacred tribal lands (Campbell 2017), American Indian groups have maintained a sense of pride in their identities. In these ways, many American Indians have not only coped with their ever-changing sociohistorical context but also thrived and developed successful, philanthropic communities.

Present Traumatic Nature of Death

Despite the resurgence, death and dying for American Indians has become more traumatic in recent years, as current populations reap the unfortunate consequences of the generations of collective struggle. The suicide rate reached an all-time high in recent years (Center for Disease Control [CDC] 2016), which not only represents a

substantial increase but also is much higher than in non-Indian populations (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH] 2018). American Indians and Alaskan natives been found to suffer from higher victimization rates of violent crime than White Americans, and a strong majority of the entire Native population, 83%, have experienced stalking, sexual violence, psychological aggression by intimate partners, or physical violence by intimate partners (National Institute of Justice [NIJ] 2016). American Indians and Alaskan Natives were more than twice as likely to die due to homicide as other racial/ethnic groups in the U. S. in recent years (Indian Health Service [IHS] 2018). One Lakota Sioux tribal member reported the occurrence of "17 murders (one year) and 26 suicides (during another year) on the reservation" (51-year-old woman). Another Lakota tribal member reflected on the compounded losses as follows:

> I have had a lot of death in the family, some from alcoholism, some from meth. I don't know too many people who died a natural death. It's really sad, but that is the case. It seems it is like that with everyone around here [the reservation]. We are always in mourning… We have a wake going on every week. It's just lots and lots of deaths. (71-year-old man; Walker 2018)

Historical Trauma and Complicated Grief/Persistent Complex Bereavement

The reciprocal relationship of historical loss with the traumatic nature of death for American Indians suggests that members of this group may currently experience historical trauma, a concept that has been well established in sociological literature. Historical trauma subsumes collective and compounded emotional and psychic wounding over the life span and across generations (Yellow Horse Brave Heart 1998). It is assumed to have taken place when: (a) mass trauma is systematically inflicted on a group by a dominant population, (b) the infliction occurs consistently over time, (c) the experience of trauma is common to numerous individuals across the group, and (d) the magnitude of the trauma results in disparities in functioning that continue across generations (Sotero 2006). Literature supports the notion that historical trauma carries important implications for American Indians' health, mental health, relationships, and social functioning (Evens-Campbell 2008; Gone 2013; Rybak and Decker-Fitts 2009; Struthers and Lowe 2003; Whitbeck et al. 2004a, b; Yellow Horse Brave Heart 2003; Yellow Horse Brave Heart et al. 2011). In particular, American Indian adults report having frequent thoughts in regard to historical losses and that the thoughts accompany negative emotions, leading to either anxiety/depression or anger/avoidance tendencies (Whitbeck et al. 2004a, b).

Literature has also suggested that historical trauma may relate to unresolved grief. The Lakotas, who were at one point in time prohibited from engaging in traditional spiritual practices that effectively aid in grief management, began to experience more complicated grief (Yellow Horse Brave Heart 1998; Yellow Horse Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998). The absence of effective socially structured coping

mechanisms, compounded with additional traumatic incidents, such as family disruption due to forced removal of children to boarding schools, exacerbated the complicated grief experience over time (Halverson et al. 2002; Yellow Horse Brave Heart 1998). Subsequent research has found that persistent complex bereavement, the more current term for complicated grief, is predicted by post-traumatic stress through undermining an individual's sense of self-efficacy and disrupting his or her worldview (Smith et al. 2014). [Research conflicts somewhat about the conceptual strands of the two diagnostic terms, but both capture the difficulty associated with traumatic loss (Cozza et al. 2016; Maciejewski et al. 2016)]. Some American Indians have reported a sense of hopelessness and shattered assumptions about the world in the wake of their own losses (Walker 2018); the experience of historical trauma may, indeed, compound grief for these individuals.

Death Rituals and Beliefs

The 573 federally recognized tribes in the United States (Federal Register 2018) constitute a vastly diverse group of people. Differing degrees of assimilation to Western culture, family preferences, and circumstances also result in a variety of experiences. There may thus be more within-group than between-group variance for American Indians, especially in regard to specific rituals accompanying a death. Though supplemented by other research when available, most of the information in this section originates from two qualitative studies conducted by the author. The first study explored death experiences in the Muscogee Creek, some findings of which have been published in several prior journal articles (see Walker 2008, 2009; Walker and Balk 2007; Walker and Thompson 2009). The second study explored death experiences of individuals who are associated with the Lakota Sioux Tribe; we provide preliminary data here in the form of direct quotes from participant interviews. The following sections discuss the more commonly held bereavement rituals, grief responses to loss, perspectives of spirituality and meanings attributed to death.

Bereavement Rituals and the Facilitation of Grief

Bereavement rituals reflect the cultural values of American Indians, which in turn help to facilitate and manage grief responses. The worldview of traditional American Indians tends to shun the notion of individuality and development of completely separate, distinct souls (Chaudhuri and Chaudhury 2001). After a death, the family and community come together as a unit and conduct a wake ceremony at least one night before the funeral. Though some Creeks have reported preferring to be alone to cry, the sense of community resulting from the wake helps them to cope with their grief. "That's all part of the communal philosophy of the Muscogee people…we

help each other get through crises" (56-year-old woman; Walker 2008, p. 132). Lakotas report a similar experience: "(We) not only visit and talk about (our)selves, but (we) share memories about the person. It is a way of relieving some grief; we laugh a lot and are just around one another," (70-year-old man; Walker 2018). The communal nature of the wake also provides opportunity for educating younger tribal members. "It's really a beautiful time and a sad time. People are grieving, yes, but there is also a lot of teaching and learning about our Lakota ways, in our language, going on" (44-year-old woman; Walker 2018). Through the structure of the wake ceremony, strands of hope for the next generation emerge.

In this spirit, American Indians rely on interpersonal relationships during loss, and rituals reflecting connectedness with the deceased person developed from this sense of kinship (Cacciatore 2009). In many tribes, male members dig the grave by hand and cover the casket completely after it is lowered (Walker and Balk 2007; Walker 2018), suggesting willingness to stand physically by the deceased person until the last possible moment. Memoirs are often included in the casket with the person. Creeks include personal belongings of the deceased; a Lakota survivor may remove a lock of his or her own braided hair, representing connection to Mother Earth, and include that in the casket. The deceased individual is acknowledged personally, whether by each person in attendance throwing a handful of dirt into the grave before it is covered, a tradition known as a "farewell handshake" for Creeks (Walker and Balk 2007), or by singing and calling out the person's name four times just before burial, as the Lakotas do (Walker 2018). In other tribes, such as the Apache, members begin to fill the grave with a farewell handshake but do not fully cover the grave by hand; they also dig a second grave beside the person and bury all his or her belongings. In the Navajo tribe, members do not speak the name of the person after he or she is buried so as not to summon the person's spirit back to earth (Clements et al. 2003). Rather, family members cleanse themselves after the burial, as if to "move on," signaling the end of mourning. The commonality among all of these variations is connectedness with the deceased person and commitment to assisting in his or her successful transition to the next life.

American Indians also tend to perceive time in a cyclical, rather than linear, fashion (Herring 1990), and this value is reflected in the timing of events that unfold after a death. The cycle of life occurs in fours, and many tribes thus construct bereavement traditions in fours.

> Four is a sacred number for all Native Americans. When you listen to the history and lessons told to the Creek people after day one, everything came in fours; four cardinal directions, four phases of the moon; four fires; four winds; four sacred colors; four seasons. All the healing chants that supposedly came from the Creator and were given to the American people, especially the Muscogee people, were in fours. We do everything symbolically in fours. (51-year-old man; Walker and Balk 2007, p. 645)

For instance, many American Indians, including the Creeks, Lakotas, and Navajos, traditionally wait 4 days before burying the dead person. During those 4 days, "they are going to travel to everywhere they have been on Earth. They might go to a house, and wherever else they want, and see those people" (71-year-old Lakota man). Tribes also tend to incorporate a socialized mourning period reflecting

the same cyclical balance. In the case of the Creeks, the period is at least 4 days after the burial and up to the first moon, and for the Lakotas, the period is four seasons or one full year after the burial (Walker and Balk 2007; Walker 2018). During the mourning period, members do not engage in social activities of any kind or dancing at powwows. The end of the mourning period marks the completion of grief, releasing the dead person completely to the afterlife and the survivors to moving forward with their lives on the earth. This period provides structure for some important tasks involved in grieving, giving permission to focus on the loss, and designating a point where survivors become more oriented toward restoration, though it may not be helpful for everyone. One Lakota participant commented on this, stating, "That made it much harder, knowing this whole process was happening, taking a long time. When you just get it done, it seems like it is better" (39-year-old woman; Walker 2018).

Another reflection of American Indian value of balance occurs in the use of Indian medicine. One Lakota man (48 years old) said, "There's a balance; to have positivity, you have to have negativity." A Creek woman (56 years old) said, "I believe that there has to be a balance in life. There is positive and negative, hot-cold, salty-sweet, sadness-happiness to everything in life" (Walker 2008, p. 135). Medicine men work to re-establish balance in regard to negative events by cleansing or purification when the physical body or mind becomes impure. For the Lakota, during periods of unrest, the use of medicine in the form of sweat lodge participation, provides peace. When there are negative thoughts, medicine in the form of burning sage, for instance, cleanses those thoughts (Walker 2018). For the Creeks, medicine used for the purpose of purification after a death is thought to prevent physical illness of the survivors who have been around the body and also to help with their grief. "You wash from the top down. You drink some, and you wash your legs and make sure nothing is left. It runs off into the earth and you feel lighthearted. You want to laugh again, not immediately, but you will" (53-year-old woman; Walker 2008, p. 129).

Collectively, the use of medicine among American Indian groups reflects the notion that difficulties related to death can be alleviated, at least somewhat, and that balance can be restored.

Death has been reported to be difficult for everyone and is perhaps the most difficult thing one might face in life (Cacciatore 2009; Walker 2008, 2018). Individual responses to grief vary widely within American Indian groups, from highly complicated to solemnly accepting. The use of the common rituals discussed in this section seems to assist most of those in Indian groups in facilitating and managing their grief through socially constructed norms. Several who reported also experiencing rituals associated with non-Indian deaths found their own traditions to serve as their primary source of personal comfort. One Creek woman (48 years old) said, "I have been to a couple of funerals for non-Indian people. It's over with real short, and we're gone" (Walker and Balk 2007, p. 644). Another Lakota tribal member reflected on this. "I have had friends that are non-Indians, and when someone dies, the next day that's it; they just go on. It seems kind of cold and not a good way to honor that

person. I don't know, maybe we drag it out too long" (71-year-old man; Walker 2018).

> I could compare it (the Lakota way) to my father, who is White. When my grandpa, my father's father, passed away, the experience was so strange for me because the service was so short. There was a viewing one evening for 2 h, and then the next morning there was a funeral. And then it was over. Ours is very drawn out. On my Native side, there are protocols in place that allow me to grieve and give me permission to do so (44-year-old woman; Walker 2018).

Spirituality and Beliefs About Death

The interaction of bereavement rituals and grieving is nested in a firm context of spiritual awareness for many American Indians. Research focused on Native culture has found that scientific inquiry based on linearity, reductionism, and establishing a causal relationship is ineffective in capturing the worlds of traditional American Indians (Chaudhuri 2001). Separating spirituality into a distinct construct diminishes its meaning and importance, as American Indians see spirituality as an integral part of life, pervading every dimension; it must thus be considered in holistic terms (Portman and Garrett 2006). Native spirituality, which is experiential and action-based, has no doctrine or required belief systems, suggesting more freedom for American Indians to observe patterns as they emerge. There is no word for "religion" in many Native languages. One Lakota participant said, "It's not really a religion. It's our culture. It's the way we live and how we do it. We pray every day, and that is the way we have always done it" (71-year-old man).

With greater assimilation to Western values, however, Christianity has become more widespread among American Indians. Christianity is based on a belief system that is largely cognitive and may thus contribute to higher likelihood of experiencing shattered assumptions about the world and how it works. In the face of a traumatic or violent loss, for instance, Christians may have to grapple with re-constructing meaning when the death seems non-purposeful and nonsensible (Walker and Thompson 2009). On the other hand, a devoted Lakota Christian suggested that Christian beliefs in forgiveness and redemption provide hope to the hopeless. He said of the Lakotas, "We don't like ourselves. We all walk through life trying to accept ourselves…but it is difficult" (70-year-old man).

Some Indians embrace traditional Native spirituality, some are committed only to Christian beliefs, and many have found ways to integrate both. Both Native spirituality and Christianity may be capable of speaking to aspects of traumatic loss, including undermining the survivor's sense of self-efficacy and disrupting his or her worldview, that predicts persistent complex bereavement (Smith et al. 2014). Regardless of religiosity, certain common trends emerged among both Creek and Lakota participants: (a) an assumption of monotheism, (b) an orientation toward life after death, (c) a conceptualization of the "afterlife" as an improvement, and (d) an experience of visitation from others who have died earlier.

Monotheism

American Indians are typically monotheistic. Muscogee Creeks referred to God as *Ibofanga*, the One Great Spirit, who is a genderless, universal energy that permeates everything (Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri 2001). Lakota Sioux referred to God formally as *Wakan Tanka*, the Sacred or the Great Spirit. Participants often used the more familiar term, *Tunkasula*, meaning "Grandfather," when referring to God. Creek and Lakota participants mentioned prayer frequently in their interviews. Prayer was not always directed toward God but was also directed toward ancestors who have passed on or to Mother Earth. One Lakota participant (60-year-old woman) said, "It doesn't matter who you pray to. It just matters that you pray" (Walker 2018). This may be explained through Black Elk's teachings to the Lakotas that the ultimate peace resides in awareness of individuals' connection with everything in the universe, the center of which is *Wakan Tanka* (Rice 1991).

Life After Death

Most believe that the spirit continues to live (Cacciatore 2009), a conceptualization that tends to assist in the survivor developing comforting thoughts about the deceased person. It helps the bereaved manage feelings of isolation or loneliness. One Lakota woman (39 years old) said, "I feel like we are never by ourselves…they don't leave us. They just walk in a world beside us." It also helps individuals to develop mechanisms to effectively cope with their grief. One Lakota man (48 years old) said,

> An old-school medicine man talked about death and life here on earth. He said that our time here, however many years, is like a blink of an eye in the Spirit world. It may seem like a long time that we are living, but in the Spirit world it is really small. To cope with death, you've got to believe that time is just a little piece. You're going to see them soon. That's what helps sustain me through death of a loved one. (Walker 2018)

One Creek Indian said, "Sometimes even in our dances, I believe that they come back and join us. They dance with us" (56-year-old woman; Walker and Thompson 2009, p. 138).

The Afterlife as an Improvement

With some exception, American Indian participants tended to be of the opinion that life after death is much better than life before death. One Lakota participant (48-year-old man) said, "When you're up in the spirit world, it's just perfect. Your body is young, and you have no pain. It's green, the sun is shining, it's 70 something degrees, it's perfect. You are always happy. No sadness" (Walker 2018). A Creek participant (36-year-old woman) contrasted Christian and ceremonial ground teachings, saying,

> When I was raised, I thought that (people who died) went to heaven or hell. For the last few years, I really got into ceremonials, and the way they taught is that there actually isn't a hell. God is coming to get all his people. Where we're living now is actually hell. This is hell. (Walker and Thompson 2009, p. 135)

A Lakota participant (69-year-old woman), who experienced the tragic death of her daughter at a young age, said, "Oh, where we go after we die is definitely better than here. Death is a reward" (Walker 2018). Another Lakota participant (44-year-old woman) suggested that dead people become the best form of themselves, saying, "I've had (dead) people visit me in my dreams during days when I was in heavy prayer, and they were always younger. They end up in a younger form of themselves…not childlike, but I would say in their early 20s" (Walker 2018).

> ***"They come get us."*** Consistent with the previous quote, Creek and Lakota participants alike commonly, though not in every case, reported sensing the presence of dead loved ones as guides, through images, animals, and dreams. One Lakota participant (44-year-old woman) said, "I feel like people who have passed on and are in the spirit world watch over us. I think that when we pray for them to help us, we get different little signs that they are still watching over us and we are still connected to them." (Walker 2018)

Often, the presence of dead loved ones was described as purposeful, in that they would visit dying persons to escort them to the afterlife. One Creek participant (59-year-old woman) said,

> (My nephew) was sick at the hospital, and I dreamed that my mother came to me. I had four little kids, including my nephew, in the car with me. We were on a hillside, and it was green and there were flowers. She came to the car and opened the door. She got my little nephew and said, "Come on, Baby, you're going to go with me." I got out too because I thought she wanted us to all go with her, but she said, "No, you all can't come with us. I came after him, and I want him to see what's over here." She took his hand, and I could see him just hopping and skipping. It wasn't too long after that when he died. (Walker and Thompson 2009, p. 140)

While anxiety-provoking for some, receiving visits from dead loved ones can be comforting. A Lakota participant (48-year-old man) explained this as follows:

> My father used to stay here during the summer and go to Sun Dances. One day, he said to me, "You know, Junior, they said I have one more year." When I asked him who said that, he just smiled, so I knew the Spirits had told him. A year later, within a week of that day, he passed on. He could talk when he was on his deathbed, and there he told me, "You know, your mother and my mom and dad (who were all dead) came. I'm getting close now because they're coming to see me." And so he knew. Then he said, "I've lived a long life. I'm happy…I'm ready." (Walker 2018)

Meaning of Death

Death, for American Indians, is natural, cyclical, and transitional. Navajos attribute death to the source of motivation for growth for humans in the natural world (Clark 1997). Hopis see death as a part of the natural cycle as they alternate through dual existences of soul and body (Leming and Dickinson 2016). Creeks seem to see

death with some ambivalence but, ultimately, as a sign of progress. One participant (56-year-old woman) said, "With the Creek tradition of life as a cycle and death as an acceptable part, it's not a happy time necessarily, but it's not something to be dreaded" (Walker and Thompson 2009, p. 141). Another (51-year-old man) suggested that death represents development to our full potential and no longer having need for a physical body:

> We have to have as much knowledge as we can to stay right and obedient to the ceremonial chief, to the community, to the people, and to God the Creator. Before you can be obedient you have to have a certain amount of meekness and humbleness. When you are at that point, and I think we are supposed to get to that point, the spirit permeates the body, and those people go on. (Walker and Thompson 2009, p. 142)

Lakota participants actively acknowledged death in most cases, either embracing it or denying it, and they also tended to counter these expressions with reports of highly traumatic and compounded losses. One participant (71-year-old man) said, "We came from a warrior society. We want to die a warrior, so we look forward to it. Death was almost something we welcomed." Another participant (69-year-old woman) stated, "Death is a reward." Yet another participant (51-year-old woman) said, "There is no death in our way. (Our) loved ones have just crossed over to the spirit world. There's no dying, just their earth body is dead."

Collectively, these perspectives suggest that death is considered a natural transition that does not terminate one's existence but merely transforms it. Both Muscogee Creek and Lakota Sioux participants indicated that no word exists in their Native languages for "goodbye." Rather, their valediction words translate to "see you later" or "until we meet again." The irreversible nature of physical death, as well as the traumatic circumstances surrounding it for some, seemed, unsurprisingly, to result in existential angst, which participants in these studies seemed to manage relatively well. One Lakota participant (69-year-old woman) articulated this eloquently as she described having to face the death of her young daughter, stating, "Everything I had experienced in life at that point brought me to that moment. I wasn't ready, but I was prepared" (Walker 2018).

Interplay of Death Rituals and Beliefs with Sociohistorical Context

Death rituals and beliefs have never been more important for the American Indians. Recent sociological trends suggest that historical trauma has begun to take its toll on the American Indian population as a whole, in the form of compounded loss and death. With suicide, homicide, and violence at all-time high levels (CDC 2016; NIJ 2016), and victimization rates being higher in comparison with other racial/ethnic groups (NIMH 2018; HIS 2018), the American Indians have experienced and re-experienced tragedy. This has led to chronic, unresolved grief for many. The Lakota participants vividly described the state of many of their fellow tribal members in

terms of hopelessness, helplessness, and general malaise (Walker 2018). There is no question about it; these are difficult times for American Indians.

Yet threads of hope were woven throughout participants' responses. Literature indicates that persistent complex bereavement works through undermining a surviving person's sense of self-efficacy and disrupting his or her worldview (Smith et al. 2014). One participant (70-year-old man) felt hopeful about his fellow Lakotas being able to accept themselves and feel a sense of self-efficacy again; he expressed eagerness to share his reasons to hope with his fellow Lakotas. Another participant (51-year-old woman), grappling with her worldview in the wake of the recent homicide of her adult son, described how she is resolving her emotional upheaval through her Native rituals and beliefs. The historical trauma and unresolved grief reactions of American Indian people are, at least sometimes, met with a deepened sense of spirituality and heightened sensitivity to supernatural events. Traumatic grief leads American Indians to their Native spiritual roots, in some cases incorporating Christian and perhaps other religious systems, for solace. The participants' responses presented here suggest the fitness of these systems and wisdom of these individuals.

Conclusions

For all humans, unexpected and unwanted change can be difficult. For American Indians, death represents a vital part of the life cycle, a moment of closure and the culmination of all knowledge, through which all things must pass.

Many times in that 4 days after a death, it rains or sprinkles. When that happens, we say "that this is a way that the footprints of wherever this person has been have been washed away. This signifies the finishing up of the life, closure of where this person has been" (56-year-old woman, Walker and Thompson 2009, p. 143).

That precise moment also represents possibility, opportunity for transformation, and birth. One Creek participant said, "Sometimes it's time for things to die. When a person dies, often in that family, a new baby will be born. That cycle is picked up and carried (on)" (Walker 2008; p. 135). "There is a lot of rebirth that happens. When somebody dies there's a baby that is born, or somebody that becomes impregnated during that time. I think it's beautiful…" (44-year-old Lakota woman; Walker 2018).

So live your life that the fear of death can never enter your heart.
Trouble no one about their religion; respect others in their view, and demand that they respect yours.
Love your life, perfect your life, beautify all things in your life.
Seek to make your life long and its purpose in the service of your people.
Prepare a noble death song for the day when you go over the great divide.
Always give a word or a sign of salute when meeting or passing a friend, even a stranger, when in a lonely place.
Show respect to all people and grovel to none.
When you arise in the morning give thanks for the food and for the joy of living.

If you see no reason for giving thanks, the fault lies only in yourself.
Abuse no one and no thing, for abuse turns the wise ones to fools and robs the spirit of its vision.
When it comes your time to die, be not like those whose hearts are filled with the fear of death, so that when their time comes they weep and pray for a little more time to live their lives over again in a different way.
Sing your death song, and die like a hero going home.
–Chief Tecumseh, Shawnee (Welker 2013)

References

Bowman, D. J. (2016). *The Sioux: The past and present of the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota*. Mankato: Capstone Press.

Cacciatore, J. (2009). Appropriate bereavement practice after the death of a Native American child. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Sciences, 90*, 46–50. https://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.3844.

Campbell, P. B. (2017, May). 'These are our Eiffel Towers, our pyramids': Why Standing Rock is about much more than oil. *The Guardian, U. S. Edition,* Retrieved June 16, 2018, from https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/may/15/those-are-our-eiffel-towers-our-pyramids-why-standing-rock-is-about-much-more-than-oil

Center for Disease Control. (2016). *Health, United States, 2016: With chartbook on long-term trends in health*. Retrieved June 16, 2018, from https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/hus16.pdf#019

Chaudhuri, J. (2001). Some notes on political theory and American Indian values: The case of the Muscogee Creeks. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 25*, 129–135. https://doi.org/10.17953/aicr.25.2.n57340673021760n.

Chaudhuri, J., & Chaudhury, J. (2001). *A sacred path: The way of the Muscogee Creeks*. Los Angeles: University of California American Indian Studies Center.

Clark, P. A. (1997). Notes on suffering, death, and Native American spirituality. *America, 177*, 19-21-24. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10822/908715

Clements, P. T., Vigil, G. J., Manno, M. S., Henry, G. C., Wilks, J., Das, S., & Foster, W. (2003). Cultural perspectives of death, grief, and bereavement. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services, 41*(7), 18–26. https://doi.org/10.3928/0279-3695-20030701-12.

Cozza, S. J., Fisher, J. E., Mauro, C., Zhou, J., Ortiz, C. D., Skritskaya, N., & Shear, M. K. (2016). Performance of DSM-5 Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder criteria in a community sample of bereaved military family members. *The American Journal of Psychiatry, 173*(9), 919–929. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2016.15111442.

Evens-Campbell, T. (2008). Historical trauma in American Indian/Native Alaska communities: A multilevel framework for exploring impacts on individuals, families, and communities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 23*(3), 316–338. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260507312290.

Exley, H. (1997). *In beauty may I walk: Words of peace and wisdom by Native Americans*. New York: Exley Publications.

Gone, J. P. (2013). A community-based treatment for Native American historical trauma: Prospects for evidence-based practice. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice, 1*(S), 78–94. https://doi.org/10.1037/2326-4500.1.S.78.

Grandbois, D. M., & Sanders, G. F. (2009). The resilience of Native American elders. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 30*(9), 569–580. https://doi.org/10.1080/01612840902916151.

Halverson, K., Puig, M. E., & Byers, S. R. (2002). Culture loss: American Indian family disruption, urbanization, and the Indian Child Welfare Act. *Child Welfare, 81*(2), 319–336. https://www.cwla.org/child-welfare-journal/.

Herring, R. (1990). Understanding Native American values. *Counseling and Values, 34*, 134–136. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-007X.1990.tb00918.x.

Indian Health Service. (2018, April). *Mortality disparity rates: American Indians and Alaska Natives in the HIS service area (2009–2011) and U. S. all races (2010)*. Retrieved June 16, 2018, from https://www.ihs.gov/newsroom/factsheets/disparities/

Jilek, W. (1978). Native renaissance: The survival and revival of indigenous therapeutic ceremonies among North American Indians. *Transcultural Psychiatric Research Review, 15*(2), 117–147. https://doi.org/10.1177/136346157801500201.

Leming, M., & Dickinson, G. E. (2016). *Understanding death, dying, and bereavement* (8th ed.). Stamford: Cengage Learning.

Maciejewski, P. K., Maercker, A., Boelen, P. A., & Prigerson, H. G. (2016). "Prolonged grief disorder" and "persistent complex bereavement disorder," but not "complicated grief," are one and the same diagnostic entity: An analysis of data from the Yale Bereavement Study. *World Psychiatry, 15*(3), 266–275. https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20348.

National Congress of State Legislatures. (2018, January 30). *Federal Register*, volume 83, number 20. Retrieved June 16, 2018, from https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2018-01-30/pdf/2018-01907.pdf

National Institute of Justice. (2016, December 1). *Five things about violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women and men: Findings from the national intimate partner and sexual violence survey*. Retrieved June 16, 2018, from https://www.nij.gov/five-things/Pages/violence-against-american-indian-and-alaska-native-women-and-men.aspx

National Institute of Mental Health. (2018, May). *Suicide is the leading cause of death in the United States (2016): Data courtesy of CDC*. Retrieved June 16, 2018, from https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.shtml

Portman, T. A. A., & Garrett, M. T. (2006). Native American healing traditions. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 53*, 453–469. https://doi.org/10.1080/10349120601008647.

Rice, J. (1991). *Black Elk's story: Distinguishing its Lakota purpose*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Rybak, C., & Decker-Fitts, A. (2009). Understanding Native American healing practices. *Counseling Psychology Quarterly, 22*(3), 333–342. https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070903270900.

Smith, A. J., Abeyta, A. A., Hughes, M., & Jones, R. T. (2014). Persistent grief in the aftermath of mass violence: The predictive roles of post-traumatic stress symptoms, self-efficacy, and disrupted worldview. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, advance online publication., 7*, 179–186. https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000002.

Sotero, M. M. (2006). A conceptual model of historical trauma: Implications for public health practice and research. *Journal of Health Disparities Research and Practice, 1*, 93–108. Retrieved from https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/jhdrp/1.

Struthers, R., & Lowe, J. (2003). Nursing in Native American culture and historical trauma. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 24*(3), 257–272. https://doi.org/10.1080/01612840305275.

Thornton, R. (1990). *American Indian holocaust and survival: A population history since 1492*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Walker, A. C. (2008). Grieving in the Muscogee Creek tribe. *Death Studies, 32*, 123–141. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481180701801238.

Walker, A. C. (2009). Building bridges in American Indian bereavement research. *Death Studies, 59*(4), 351–367. https://doi.org/10.2190/OM.59.4.e.

Walker, A. C. (2018). *Grieving and bereavement rituals in individuals within the Lakota Sioux Tribe*. Unpublished raw data.

Walker, A. C., & Balk, D. E. (2007). Bereavement rituals in the Muscogee Creek tribe. *Death Studies, 31*, 633–652. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481180701405188.

Walker, A. C., & Thompson, T. (2009). Muscogee Creek spirituality and meaning of death. *Omega, 59*(2), 129–146. https://doi.org/10.2190/OM.59.2.c.

Weaver, H. N., & White, B. J. (1997). The Native American family circle: Roots of resiliency. *Journal of Family Social Work, 2*, 67–79. https://doi.org/10.1300/J039v02n01_05.

Welker, G. (2013, December 10). *Return to indigenous people's literature: Chief Tecumseh*. Retrieved from http://www.indigenouspeople.net/tecumseh.htm

Whitbeck, L. B., Adams, G. W., Hoyt, D. R., & Chen, X. (2004a). Conceptualizing and measuring historical trauma among American Indian people. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 33*, 119–130. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:AJCP.0000027000.77357.31.

Whitbeck, L. B., Chen, X., Hoyt, D. R., & Adams, G. W. (2004b). Discrimination, historical loss and enculturation: Culturally specific risk and resiliency factors for alcohol abuse among American Indians. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol, 65*(4), 409–418. https://doi.org/10.15288/jsa.2004.65.409.

Yellow Horse Brave Heart, M. (1998). The return to the sacred path: Healing the historical trauma and the historical unresolved grief response among the Lakota through a psychoeducational group intervention. *Smith College Studies in Social Work, 68*(3), 287–305. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377319809517532.

Yellow Horse Brave Heart, M. (2003). The historical trauma response among natives and its relationship with substance abuse: A Lakota illustration. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, 35*, 7–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/02791072.2003.10399988.

Yellow Horse Brave Heart, M., Chase, J., Elkins, J., & Altschul, D. B. (2011). Historical trauma among indigenous peoples of the Americas: Concepts, research, and clinical considerations. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, 43*(4), 282–290. https://doi.org/10.1080/02791072.2011.628913.

Yellow Horse Brave Heart, M., & DeBruyn, L. M. (1998). The American Indian holocaust: Healing historical unresolved grief. *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research, 8*(2), 60–82. https://doi.org/10.5820/aian.0802.1998.60.

The Beauty of the Afterlife Among the Inuit of Nunavut

Frédéric Laugrand

Abstract Based on oral Inuit accounts collected by Knud Rasmussen in the 1920s and by myself almost a century later during several Nunavut knowledge-sharing workshops, I argue that Inuit elders do not fear death. On the contrary, death has a real power of attraction, which young people must beware. I first analyze the components of a person and in particular the concept of *tarniq*. I then describe the places where Inuit go after death and how these places were transformed with the coming of Christianity. Finally, I examine near-death experiences. Life continues after death on two levels: while the *tarniq*, the double-soul, joins the world of the dead, the *atiq*, the name-soul, is passed on to a newborn child and recycled. The dead thus live on, as much in the world of the living as in other worlds. As for the living, their time comes when they can no longer cope with life. They can then easily opt for a better life elsewhere.

Keywords Inuit · Death · Deceased · Soul · Reincarnation · Near-death experiences

> What we have heard about the soul shows us that the life of men and beasts does not end with death. When at the end of life we draw our last breath, that is not the end. We awake to consciousness again, we come to life again, and all this is effected through the medium of the soul. Therefore it is that we regard the soul as the greatest and most incomprehensible of all (Rasmussen 1929, pp. 60–61).

> We were constantly assured that death was nothing to fear and the place where one would end after death, in particular the place in the heavens, was a jubilant place to be. (Kappianaq IE-155)

Strangely enough, although the Inuit of northern Canada are among the world's most studied peoples, and although their suicide rate is among the world's highest

F. Laugrand (✉)
LAAP, Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-neuve, Belgique
e-mail: frederic.laugrand@uclouvain.be

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_21

(52.2 per 100,000 in 2013 according to Statistics Canada), few scholars have studied the Inuit view of death. Some pioneering studies were done in Greenland by R. Petersen (1967) and R. Kjellstrom (1975–1976), and in Canada by B. Saladin d'Anglure (1998). Lately, Lisa Stevenson (2014) has looked into the name-soul of newborn children and the renewal of life it makes possible.

In a statistical report on suicide for Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Jack Hicks (2015) makes a link—as many others have—between suicide and mental problems. He concludes: "Suicide is not a part of Inuit culture." This assertion seems wrong, and the available anthropological literature supports a more nuanced view. Suicide is certainly not advisable for young people, but it was once common for elderly individuals in a desperate situation. In the Netsilik area, in 1960, Asen Balikci documented about 50 cases of successful and attempted suicides, most of them by hanging or gun shot (Balikci 1960: 3–4). Today, despair is driving Inuit youth to commit suicide at unprecedented levels, one of several signs of their discontent with modern life.

This paper will neither explore the reasons for suicide nor criticize existing studies. The aim is rather to re-examine death as a social phenomenon in light of Inuit views on the afterlife. Nor will the effects of Christianization be addressed in detail. The aim is simply to understand how Inuit see death and the afterlife, by using present-day materials and accounts by Inuit elders, and by looking closely at near-death experiences in the hope of finding an interesting key. For lack of space, funeral rites will not be discussed.

The anthropological data come from various sources and from several regions of present-day Nunavut: the Iglulik region, for which we have very extensive old and recent sources (see Lyon 1824; Hall 1864; Rasmussen 1929; the 400 interviews in the *Igloolik Oral History Database*); the Nattilik region (see Rasmussen 1931; accounts from several workshops about the passing on of knowledge); and South Baffin (Boas 1888, 1901 and accounts by several elders from the series *Interviewing Inuit Elders* and *Inuit Perspectives on the XXth Century*; the books of these series provide the transcriptions of discussions between elders and young people). Finally, I have used information from several workshops about the passing on of knowledge, which I organized between 1997 and 2015 with my colleague Jarich Oosten. All of the oral sources were recorded and transcribed in Inuktitut before being translated into English between 1997 and 2015 by Alexina Kublu, Mary Thompson, and Gloria Putumiraqtuq.

Inuit elders know that life is more gratifying in the other world than in this one. In the past, when life became too painful in this world, suicide and homicide were accepted solutions. In the 1920s, while crossing the Arctic, the explorer Knud Rasmussen related two examples of such thinking:

> I once saw a wise old man hang himself, because he was starving to death; he had retained his senses and preferred to die in time: but before doing so he filled his mouth with clean-gnawed seal bones; in that way he considered he would get meat in plenty in the land of the dead. (Rasmussen 1931, p. 138)

Rasmussen reported an even more striking example, the case of Nagfaq, Inugssak's mother.

> Once when there was a famine she gave birth to a child, while people lay round about her dying of hunger. What did that little child want here? How could it live, when its mother, who should give it life, was herself dried up and starving? So she strangled it and allowed it to freeze, and later on ate it. Next day a seal was caught and they saved her life. But from that time she was paralyzed and could not hold her water. That, people said, was because she had eaten part of herself. (Rasmussen 1931, p. 138)

Nagfaq's tragedy evokes another one with Kikkik, an Ahiarmiut woman who, during the winter of 1958, was compelled to bury her two daughters alive in the snow, knowing they would not survive the famine.

These examples attest to Inuit courage and show that, in extreme circumstances, neither suicide nor homicide was unthinkable. The conditions of life have changed, and the Inuit have adopted Christianity, but these transformations have not destroyed the appeal of leaving this world for the next, once life has become unbearable. Death is merely a passage from here to there.

For an elder, death is a rupture only with society. The components of a person—the double-soul (*tarniq*) and the name-soul (*atiq*)—live on, the former in the place where you go after death and the latter in the infants who inherit your name. Death is thus a necessary passage from the world of the living to the world of the dead. Even after making this passage the dead remain steadfast partners of the living and regularly communicate with them through dreams. The afterlife also seems like a nice place, at least to Inuit who have come back from the brink of death. This is what we learn from near-death experiences.

Almost a century ago, Rasmussen (1929, pp. 106–107) warned his readers how difficult it was to understand what death means to Inuit, their views having probably begun to change when Bibles were first handed out at trading posts. We have in fact studied how entire groups of Inuit converted to Christianity (see Laugrand 2002), but the magnitude of the conversions does not necessarily mean that Inuit traditions were immediately and radically transformed.

According to these traditions, as Rasmussen pointed out, death has not always existed. A myth explains how it came to be:

> In the very earliest times, there was no death among human beings. […] mankind grew so numerous that at last there was not room for all. […]. Very slowly, then, one side of the island began to slope down towards the sea. The people grew frightened, for it seemed as if they might slip off and be drowned. But then an old woman began to shout; she had power in her words, and she called out loudly: […] "Let be so ordered that human beings can die, for there will no longer be room for us on earth". And the woman's words had such power that her wish was fulfilled. Thus death came among mankind. (Rasmussen 1929, p. 92)

Death therefore appeared on earth with the utterance of words by an old woman. Humans have had to submit to it ever since. For Inuit, death can have different causes: accidents, murders, illnesses, or sorcery. In times past, the *angakkuit* or shamans could foresee it and discern its causes in the case of illness. Today, shamanism is present but invisible. Like Inuit in general, shamans have incorporated Christianity into their ways of thinking (Laugrand and Oosten 2010).

Elders still talk about death, as they had in earlier times. Ava, an old shaman, told Rasmussen:

> What we do not understand is the change which takes place in a body when death lays hold of it. It is the same body that went about among us and was living and warm and spoke as we do ourselves, but it has suddenly been robbed of a power, for lack of which it becomes cold and stiff and putrefies. Therefore we say that a man is ill when he has lost a part of his soul, or one of his souls; for there are some who believe that man has several souls. If then that part of a man's vital force be not restored to the body, he must die. Therefore we say that a man dies when the soul leaves him. (Rasmussen 1929, p. 93)

According to Ava, death happens when the *tarniq* (the miniature body image within the body, the shadow, the soul) is separated from the physical body (*timi*). While the physical body decays, the *tarniq* remains intact. Inuit assume it leaves the physical body and goes off to a place reserved for the dead. Sometimes, however, the *tarniq* may continue to wander on earth. Inuit say they sometimes see former loved ones in real life and even more so in dreams, whose master spirit is called Aipatle. He is the one who feeds the souls of the dead with the meat the living offer him. Thus, as Rasmussen put it, death and sleep are allied (Rasmussen 1929, p. 93).

Today, Inuit still seek help from deceased individuals by invoking and using their names. They visit their graves, eat in their honour, or gratify them by offering meat. A hunter knows that his hunting success is due in part to his deceased ancestors and to the qualities he has inherited from them. The dead nonetheless have an ambiguous relationship with the living. They may travel to the land of the dead or roam here and there in this world. They may also appear in dreams and ask that an infant be given their name or that they be allowed to reincarnate in another living being, either human or animal. Several modes of existence are therefore possible. On a final note, the dead become non-social beings, thus making themselves a source of danger for the living through mere contact.

Elders seem unanimous in telling young people to learn to detach themselves from departed loved ones. Elisapee Ootoova, from Mittimatalik, stressed this point: "If we are constantly thinking about a close deceased relative, we can let our grief get the better of us. It can even affect our sleep. Even if we feel a lot of grief, we have to tell ourselves that that is in the past and his life is finished. Some people can make themselves sick or age prematurely from grieving too much over a deceased relative" (Therrien and Laugrand 2001, p. 132). Felix Pisuk and Salome Qalasiq, from Rankin Inlet, said you have to know how to break off a relationship with a deceased person, or else risk occasionally having an *uqumanngirniq*, a sort of paralyzing dream that occurs during sleep: "If a person … or I started dreaming about my deceased father or mother coming to get us, we would realize that there was something bad about this person. We would *qinugijuq*, order the person to leave" (Kolb and Law 2001, p. 159). Sleep and death are therefore closely interlinked; while asleep, someone in this world may be drawn toward the other.

In this paper, I will first review how Inuit conceive the components that make up a person. I will then describe how, probably under the influence of Christianization, several places where people go after death have merged with the Christian heaven.

Finally, I will analyze two near-death experiences that confirm the allure of the afterlife for those who have come close to death.

Inuit and Death: What Happens to the Different Components of a Person?

In the past like today, Inuit believe that a person is composed of a *timi* (the physical body), a *tarniq* (a miniature image of the body, described as a shadow), and an *atiq* (a name shared with a namesake). To live, a person is also composed of *anirniq* (breath) and *inusia* (life force). When death occurs, the body (*timi*) was said to give up its breath and its life force. Death is thus a process during which the components of a person come apart, each of them now following its own fate. The body loses its unity: the *timi* decomposes, the *tarniq* leaves to go to a place for the dead and ideally to the land of the dead, the *atiq* is passed on to another person, and the *anirniq* goes back to *Sila*, i.e., to the environment (or to its spirit).

Humans and animals have a *tarniq*, a term derived from *taaq-*, which may be translated as 'shadow,' and which refers to a miniature image of the body that is lodged within the body. Missionaries and anthropologists have translated this term as 'soul.' For Inuit, this component is located in the groin. Ordinary people cannot see it, but shamans can. As Rasmussen (1929, pp. 58–59) explained:

> The soul, tarniŋa or inuˑsia, is that which gives to all living things their particular appearance. In the case of human beings it is really a tiny human being, in the case of the caribou a tiny caribou, and so on with all animals; an image, but very much smaller than the creature itself. The inuusia (meaning "appearance as a human being") is situated in a bubble of air in the groin; from it proceed appearance, thoughts, strength and life, it is that which makes the man a man, the caribou a caribou, the walrus a walrus, the dog a dog, etc.

Tarninga, literally 'his/her *tarniq*,' does not mean *inusia*, contrary to what Rasmussen claimed. It is a miniature self-image inside a *pullaq* (an air bubble). Life depends on it, but it will survive death. It is still widely believed to exist. Felix Pisuk, from Rankin Inlet, said: "When I die my *tarniq* will no longer be a bubble. It will become the way you see me. My *tarniq* will have the same appearance as my body but without bones" (Kolb and Law 2001, p. 1). Health and life force therefore depend on the *tarniq*, which, so it is thought, can leave the body temporarily during sleep. It may then wander off and never come back, causing death.

In times past, the *tarniq* was described as being the weakest part of the body. Rasmussen (1929, p. 58) added that the *tarniq* should be respected to avoid incurring its wrath. Furthermore, any act of violence against it or breach of taboo could turn it into an evil spirit that may sow death and destruction. As Rasmussen observed (1929, p. 93): "The soul of a good and peaceable man may suddenly turn into an evil spirit." This observation explains all of the precautions and rituals that were, and still are, incumbent on the living when a human or an animal dies, each kind of creature being treated with special rules and customs.

Rasmussen (1929 pp. 183–184) cited two of the fundamental rules that apply when a death occurs: no work must be done for 3 days, and clothing may be mended but not made. With Christianization the rules have changed, but a person's death still requires ritual prohibitions. Likewise, Inuit still believe that the different components of a person have different fates after death.

The *tarniq* has become identified with the Christian soul. Today, most Inuit say the soul goes to heaven or to hell. Some, however, believe that *tarniit* may become *tupilait*, evil spirits that roam here and there in communities, causing illness and suffering. Such a transformation will happen when the living fail to respect the wishes of the deceased or if social rules are broken. These spirits are an interesting topic for elders, many of whom say that *tupilait* no longer have bones and are made of blood.

In addition, a *tarniq* may leave a living human body. This can happen during shamanic séances or during dreams. As a rule, the *tarniq* will return to its corporeal envelope, thus enabling the body to wake up. Rasmussen (1929 p. 197) said a body without a soul had to stay put: "If a man has lost one of his souls, he must not go out hunting for a whole month but must remain quietly at home in hut or tent. This is in order that all his souls can get back properly into place." Qaqortingneq told Rasmussen (1931, p. 215) that shamans knew how to protect a *tarniq* and make it invulnerable by placing it under a *qulliq*, i.e., an oil lamp. Today, you can best protect it by placing a Bible, a rosary, or a crucifix under your pillow, a piece of advice that Tipuula Atagutsiaq pointedly gave young people while being interviewed at a workshop (Therrien and Laugrand 2001, p. 131). Pisuk recommended spitting, sticking your middle finger up, and wriggling your big toe (Kolb and Law 2001, pp. 189–190). The big toe is where a *tarniq* clings to the body.

Seeing your *tarniq* was not a good sign. Rasmussen (1931, p. 216) recounted the fascinating experience he heard from Manêlaq, Qaorssuaq's wife. When her husband saw a miniature of himself outside his body, he began to tremble all over and called out, telling it to return to his body. Two shamans, Oqortoq and his wife, had to summon the soul and frighten it back into Qaorssuaq, who right away became well again, shouting and singing with joy. In this story, Qaorssuaq revived when the *tarniq* came back into his body. Inuit still occasionally have similar experiences, like the *uqumangirniq*—a paralyzing dream where an external force penetrates the body and tries to abduct the *tarniq* (see Kolb and Law 2001 for several accounts by young people).

For some Inuit, the *tarniq* reincarnates. The well-known myth of Arnaqtaaqtuq is about the tribulations of a human embryo that reincarnates in several animals, (dog, seal, wolf, caribou, walrus, seal) and ends up being reborn as a human (Rasmussen 1929, pp. 59–60, 1931, p. 217; Blaisel and Arnakak 1993). Ava's thoughts on death, quoted earlier in this paper, are still common among Inuit: death is but the end of one life and the beginning of another.

Today, elders sometimes say a life corresponds to a certain amount of life force. Many add that activities like bestiality or sorcery will use up your life force and shorten your life. Conversely, by helping a disabled individual or an elder, a young person will, it is said, have more life force and, hence, a longer life. In all of these

cases, life must never be too long, or else suspicions will be aroused. On one of her visits, Rose Iqallijuq, who had reached 95 years of age, told us that Igloolik residents were wondering whether she was living two lives … By the same token, young people should not shorten their lives through suicide, this being a sort of transgression because it reverses the normal order of things, the oldest being supposed to leave before the youngest.

Elders interminably discuss the relationships between the different components of a person. All of them agree, however, that a dream about a thirsty deceased individual is a sign to pass on his/her name to a newborn baby. Tipuula Atagutsiaq, from Arctic Bay, said: "I believe if the mother dreams of a dead person, that person wants the baby to be named after him. When a dead person was asking for water in the dreams of a mother-to-be, it was seen as a sign that the baby must be named after him. So when the baby was born, he was named after the deceased" (Therrien and Laugrand 2001, p. 129).

Atiq is translated as 'name-soul' for lack of a better term. More simply, it means 'name' or 'namesake.' *Atiq* refers to a social relationship, to the links between one living person and another with the same name. When such people meet, they call each other *atiq* or *atiga* ('my name') and offer each other gifts, as if they both share the same relationship with their deceased namesake. An *atiq* should be passed on. As Rasmussen (1931, p. 220) explained: "There are also those who believe that all who have died have a strong desire to go on living on earth and therefore make their own choice of newborn people in whom they wish to live again. And in gratitude to those who satisfy their desire to live on in a new body they give special power and a special protection." Some of the dead ardently wish to live once more among humans.

Even today, Inuit feel that a name carries with it some of the deceased's physical or moral qualities and that it passes on these qualities (see Stevenson 2014). An *atiq* has no physical component and cannot be destroyed. Among the Nattilingmiut, it was thought advantageous to give someone several names, thus providing protection and a network of namesakes. Old Manelaq told Rasmussen she had managed to survive attacks by shamans and multiple hazards thanks to the different names she had received (Rasmussen 1931, p. 221).

An *atiq* thus makes a human truly human. It transforms an infant, changing mere flesh and bone into a human being. This was apparent to Father Turquetil (1968, p. 43) when he observed that in the region where he had opened his mission, at Chesterfield Inlet, infanticide struck down those infants who had not yet been named.

In sum, whatever their origin, and whatever the age of those who bequeath them, names are still being recycled because of the values, characteristics, and fates they pass on, thus enabling the dead to live again. Rasmussen explained that behind a name are all those who once bore it and who thereby pass on their strength, their willpower, and their spiritual and physical qualities (Rasmussen 1929, pp. 58–59). Rasmussen added, however, that this legacy may easily be lost if you treat your predecessors with disrespect. Shamans thus saw behind each human a procession of spirits who can help their living namesake, but who will turn against him/her and

become enemies if a taboo or a rule of life is broken. Although Inuit no longer see things in these terms, they still keep up the traditions of namesaking and passing on names.

The Land of the Dead and Its Transformations

According to the earliest written accounts, one of the oldest-known places where Inuit went after death was a country at the very top or the very bottom of the universe. It was described as a land of plenty for the dead, and ideal for caribou hunting. This view of the afterlife varied from one location to another and from one group to another.

At Iglulik, Captain Lyon (1824, p. 372) reported in the early nineteenth century that Inuit believed in the existence of two possible fates after death, depending on how you died and on your moral behaviour. The first place after death is at the centre of the earth. This is the destination for those who drown, who starve to death, who are murdered, or who are killed by animals. It was reputedly very beautiful but no shaman had ever seen it. The other place was called Adli. It has four levels that correspond to four different worlds. The lowest level was said to be the best, and everyone hoped to go there. According to Lyon, the soul initially descends at death to a place just below the visible world, and over the next few days it goes to the other levels. On the way it meets many wandering souls who are not allowed to go to the nicer places. Lyon added that these accounts made no mention of any purgatory (see also Boas 1888, pp. 589–590, 1964, pp. 181–182).

At that time the afterlife was subdivided into several levels. A few decades later Captain Hall observed that Inuit distinguished an upper world from a lower world—a probably Christianized view of the afterlife. Hall (1864, 1, p. 524) quoted an account by Tookoolito, another shaman from Igloolik:

> Qudliparmiut (heaven) is upward. Everybody happy there. All the time light; no snow, no ice, no storms; always pleasant; no trouble; never tired; sing and play all the time — all this to continue without end.
>
> Adliparmiut (hell) is downward. Always dark there. No sun; trouble there continually; snow flying all the time, terrible storms; cold, very cold; and a great deal of ice there. All who go there must always remain.
>
> All Inuit who have been good go to Qudliparmiut: that is, who have been kind to the poor and hungry, all who have been happy while living on this earth. Any one who has been killed by accident, or who has committed suicide, certainly goes to the happy place.
>
> All Inuit who have been bad — that is, unkind one to another — all who have been unhappy while on this earth, will go to Adliparmiut. If an Inung kills another because he is mad at him, he will certainly go to Adliparmiut.

In the twentieth century the Inuit of Igloolik spoke of the existence of two worlds after death. One is in the sky and inhabited by the Udlormiut or the Qulliparmiut, whom others also name the "People of Day." Rasmussen described it as a very nice place where it is always day and the seasons are reversed, a region without storms and with land animals in abundance. Rasmussen added that the Udlormiut are

known for their ball games, which give rise to the aurora borealis. Conversely, the other world is under the sea, near the home of the Sea Woman. This underworld is home to the Qimiujaarmiut or the Alliparmiut, who inhabit a narrow strip of land with sea on either side (Rasmussen 1929, p. 94).

Originally, both worlds were nice destinations. The trajectory by the dead to one or the other depended only on the circumstances: violent death taking its victims to the land of the Udlormiut, and death by illness or natural causes taking them to the land of the Qimiujaarmiut (Rasmussen 1929, p. 94). With Christianization the narrow land became associated with Hell, the missionaries describing it as a burning place with bad weather and famine.

Among the Nattilingmiut, Rasmussen (1931, p. 315) concluded from Nalungiaq's account that there were not two but rather three places after death. Aɳerlartarfik is up in the sky, in *Sila*, and literally means 'the place one can always return to' or 'the village of Eternal Homecoming,' a land of pleasure where, it was said, everyone has fun and where women and clever hunters have beautiful tattoos. The second place after death, Nɔqum·iut, was said to be underground and terrible. Those who dwell there are lazy, idle, apathetic, and bad hunters. The women are not tattooed, and the deceased who live there hang their heads. They are thin and hungry, eating only butterflies (Rasmussen 1931, pp. 316–317; see also 301). As for the third place, Nalungiaq said: "The third land is in the underworld, deep, deep down under nɔqum·iut. Those who live there we call the agle·t: those who live down there, or aglɛrmiut: those who live below."

In South Baffin, Boas reported similar descriptions of the afterlife. The world of pleasure and plenty is high above and named Qudlivun. The second world is named Adlivun, literally "those who live beneath us" (Boas 1888, pp. 588–589).

Among the Padlermiut of the Kivalliq Region, Rasmussen (1930, p. 79) reported what Kibkârjuk told him:

> Heaven is a great land. In that land there are many holes. These holes we call stars. In the land of heaven lives *pan·a* (the woman up there) or *tap·aʒuma inua* (the one that rules over, or owns, what is up there). There is a mighty spirit, and the aɳatkut hold that it is a woman. To her pass the souls of the dead. And sometimes, when many die, there are many people up there. When anything is spilt up there, it pours out through the stars and becomes rain or snow. The souls of the dead are re-born in the dwellings of *pan·a*, and brought down to earth again by the moon. When the moon is absent, and cannot be seen in the sky, it is because it is busy helping *pan·a* by bringing souls to earth. Some become human beings once more, others become animals, all manner of beasts. And so life goes on without end (*ihɔqaɳ·it·ɔq*).

These views of the afterlife therefore differ significantly from one region to another, but all Inuit refer to higher and lower worlds where life goes on. Interestingly, a human may after death be reincarnated in an animal body, thus breaking the chain of human individuals who pass on the name-soul. This possibility confirms the equality of human and animal flesh, the difference being the serial relationship that an *atiq* initiates and maintains. Without a personal name you cannot join human society.

When discussing the traditions of the Iglulik Inuit, Rasmussen wrote that the Sea Woman (Takanakapsaaluk) decides what happens to *tarniit*.

> All dead persons, whatever the manner of their death, go first to Takanakapsaaluk, who then alone determines where they are to dwell; those who have lived a good life without breach of taboo are sent on at once to the Land of Day, whereas those who have failed to observe the ancient rules of life are detained in her house to expiate their misdeeds, before being allowed to proceed to the Narrow Land. The dead suffer no hardship, wherever they may go, but most prefer nevertheless to dwell in the Land of Day, where the pleasures appear to be without limit. Here, they are constantly playing ball, the Eskimos' favourite game, laughing and singing, and the ball they play with is the skull of a walrus. The object is to kick the skull in such a manner that it always falls with the tusks downwards, and thus sticks fast in the ground. It is this ball game of the departed souls that appears as the aurora borealis, and is heard as a whistling, rustling, crackling sound. The noise is made by the souls as they run across the frost-hardened snow of the heavens. If one happens to be out alone at night when the aurora borealis is visible, and hears this whistling sound, one has only to whistle in return and the lights will come nearer, out of curiosity. (Rasmussen 1929, pp. 94–95)

With Christianization these views were transformed. The Sea Woman became equated with the Devil, and the idea of purgatory made its appearance. In the 1990s Kappianaq (IE-155), from Iglulik, explained:

> It was believed that when people died they used to go up to the heavens, particularly to the area where the moon is at, and there were some that went below that, not all the way but halfway in the heavens. For the people that had been killed by someone else, they would go to the place in the heavens in the same sphere as the moon. It is said that the people that had been killed will feel pain only momentarily. Once they had felt the infliction that caused their death, they no longer will feel further pain ever again. They will live in a place where they will be happy and jubilant from that moment on. […] As for the victims of drowning, they were said to go to the place of the underworld. As for others that had died by any other means, they will end up in the heaven below the place where the murder victims are. They too are happy but not as much as the ones above them. Here they wait for something to happen, something that I have no knowledge of. I have no knowledge as to what they would wait for according to the belief prior to Christian religion, but in my interpretation of the Christian religion it is said to be the Purgatory. Yes, they are below the ones that reside at the moon or near it at least. It is said that there are different layers in the heavens, so each layer is occupied accordingly. It is said that the underworld is a world on its own as well, where there are skies as well, same as what one would see in our world. Nakkaajut [go under the earth] would make the journey to this underworld by penetrating the earth. Once they have passed through it, they will come out to a world complete with skies and all.

Kappianaq was influenced by Christianity, as seen by his reference to Purgatory. Nonetheless, he still linked the way people die to their fate after death, stating that those who die a violent death are guaranteed a happy afterlife, unless they die by drowning. The latter remain under the control of the Sea Woman, who is identified with the Devil.

Rasmussen wrote that humans are severely punished if guilty of bestiality or serious offences. Isarrataitsoq, the Sea Woman's father, strikes them on the genitals for a whole year or more (Rasmussen 1929, pp. 98–99). In some cases Nuliajuk, the Sea Woman, may turn the deceased individual into an animal, as Inugpasugjuk explained to Rasmussen (1929, pp. 100–101). Some Padlermiut told Rasmussen (1930, p. 56) that humans may reincarnate as animals: "When an animal or a person dies, the soul leaves the body and flies to Pinga who then lets the life or the soul rise

again in another being, either man or animal." The shaman Igjugârjuk sometimes said half-jokingly that Pinga would turn him into a lemming.

According to Boas (1901, pp. 146–147), the dead have a choice to live again or not. Many could decide to go and live with the *Ijirait*—nonhuman entities closely associated with caribou and dwelling in the mountains, as stated by Mariano Aupilaarjuk, from Rankin Inlet, and Lucassie Nutaraaluk, from South Baffin (Saladin d'Anglure 2001, pp. 54, 56). Rose Iqallijuq (1995) explained that her first husband, Hubert Ammarualik, had gone to live with those beings.

According to oral tradition, only shamans could visit the dead (Rasmussen 1929, pp. 95 and 99–100). Today, such visits are no longer recounted, but the living still meet their deceased ancestors in dreams, and many say they have seen the places of the afterlife during near-death experiences.

Near-Death Experiences: The Beauty of the Afterlife

According to several Inuit elders, playing death (*avaniq*) was a dangerous game played by children where they would try to cut off their air supply by strangling themselves with something so they could experience a sense of euphoria. Agiaq, from Igloolik, remembered how he once played it when he was young:

> It was very scary to avajuq. When we were children we would try anything at all. I didn't do it to kill myself; I just wanted to experience it. Once I started tingling all over. I was trying to take off what I had used to avajuq with. I almost lost my senses. Another time, I think I was unconscious for a while, and I never tried it again because I was too scared. I thought I could kill myself doing this, so I didn't do it any more. I also didn't repeat it because my mother scolded me, and told me never to avajuq again. […] Young children were doing it; it was through peer pressure. The other children were doing it, so I tried it. […] Yes. I was beginning to pulamittuq, lose my senses. I seemed to smell blood. […] My mother did not want me to do this because I could end up killing myself. She scolded me quite harshly regarding this, so I never tried to do it again. It is not good for you. Because my mother told me not to do it, I didn't try it again. (Kolb and Law 2001, p. 151)

Felix Pisuk also discussed *avaniq* but admitted that he never experienced it himself, being too scared to try it and to become unconscious. Parents were against it and such a game was discouraged.

However, near death experiences seem to have been common.

Felix Kupak several times talked about his near-death experience on the radio, stirring up a wave of emotions in his audience. His story began in 1935, when, after a blizzard, he was struck on his temple by a stone used to hold down a tent. In his autobiography, Jean Ajaruaq (1962, pp. 39, 57) described a similar event: his companions thought him dead, only to see him suddenly walk up to a hilltop. In 2001, when interviewed over an entire week, Kupak talked about his experience, concluding: "Some people sometimes say they've died and come back to life. We sometimes see this on TV. Here, it's called *tukunaqtuq*, a near-death experience. Nobody has

ever been dead for four days and four nights, never for such a long time." In 2003, at a workshop with elders in Arviat, he finally agreed to furnish more details:

> I was unconscious for three nights and four days.
>
> When human beings die, they die on the earth. There are three things we have to go through as tests. Two of the tests are on the surface of the earth. They are not hard to go through, but the third test is very difficult. It is scary. There is a rocky area that is curved. You have to lie down on your back, not on your stomach. In that stage there is a very big chasm that is very deep. It is very dark. It seems like it is bottomless. You could see a human figure on fire far away. If you fell into that chasm, you had no choice but to fall on the being that was on fire. The rocky place with a deep chasm was very scary.

And Kupak explained what he felt:

> I heard someone behind me say, "Get up. Get up." I answered, "No. I won't be able to get up. As soon as I let go, I'll fall down." He said, "No. You won't fall, get up." I replied, "Then help me get up. I'm too scared to get up by myself." He said, "No. I will not help you; you have to get up by yourself. There was a bit of moss on the rocky hill. I put my hand out to reach it with my eyes closed. My hand stuck to it and I was able to turn on my stomach. I was able to climb up to the surface of the land. I noticed I was where I had died, and then I lost consciousness again. Then, I was back at the rocky place. I started climbing up again. It was like a form of cloud. The person I was with pointed to the left side. I looked to where he was pointing. It was a terrible scene. Our earth is so beautiful, but it seemed to be dirty and evil. I stood up again and went upwards. The man again pointed to the right without saying a word. It seems as if I'm lying, but I'm telling the truth. I was able to see people and things that I never saw anywhere, so far away. The person I was with said that he was going to go ask his boss something.
>
> He told me not to go anywhere. As he walked, he opened the door just for a split second.

And during an instant, Kupak saw a postmortem place. But soon after, the return on earth was hard:

> It was so amazingly bright. There was a big throne, and I saw someone sitting on it. When he came back, he told me that his boss wanted me to go back to earth and tell people about what I had experienced. I hadn't noticed that I was already back on earth. People on television and in movies say that they saw their bodies when they had a near-death experience, but I never saw mine.
>
> When I was back on earth, I suddenly woke up. I tried to go back to sleep, but I noticed that my boots were off. I was not able to move because I had been bleeding. My blood had frozen solid. I was very thirsty. I tried to look for the lake where we pitched our tent to get some water, but I couldn't see it. I remembered there was a river not too far from me, and there was another one where I could go to drink some water. As the sun was going down, I walked to the lake. I made it to the lake where I had gotten some water before. I was carrying a pail, but I wasn't able to drink because the water was further down. I was so thirsty. I was alone. I thought I saw something, so I looked beside me. It was my mother, Mary, and she was wearing a Rosary. I could see her very clearly. She was wearing white clothes and she didn't have any boots on. She pointed beside me without saying a word. There was a bucket like the ones we buy from the store, full of water. I didn't understand where the water had come from. I went to the bucket, and as I was going to drink some, she told me, "There are going to be people coming to you now. Show them this bucket that I gave you, so that they will see it." Anawak and others were going to bury me. They came to bury me. I got out of my unconsciousness. Even though I was unconscious, at times I started realizing my surroundings and I came back. When you come back to this life again it is not very pleasant

> because you want to stay in the time you just experienced. I was sleeping. I was a very heavy sleeper. They came looking for me. It was early in the fall.
>
> I wasn't sure if this was real, but at the same time I knew it was real. It made me wonder if it was true or not. The next thing I knew, I was being pulled by a sled with three dogs."

On his journey into the afterlife, Kupak described landscapes and the presence of humans, both living and dead. The water bucket brings to mind the thirsty ancestor who, wishing to live again, appears in a dream and asks for a glass of water. In his experience, time and space merge.

This experience had long-lasting effects on the life of Kupak, who briefly talked about it again during a workshop in Kugaaruk in 2004, stressing the very pleasant impression it made on him:

> Some people have experienced a near-death experience. I have experienced something like that. One time, I started to float in the sky and I stopped. Something opened up in the sky. Somebody opened a door. It was very enjoyable. It was a joyous time. I never wanted to go back to the earth. It was very bright. In my experience there was a very beautiful chair where you could sit down. When you experience this kind of state you don't want to go back to the earth. (Kugaaruk, 2004 workshop)

For Kupak, this near-death experience was enjoyable, not only the things he had never seen before but also the encounter with his mother. The door is a recurring image in dreams and signifies an entrance to another world.

In the case of Peter Suvaksiuq, from Arviat, his near-death experience happened after a snowmobile accident. On that occasion he was bitten by a wolf spirit, which took him away to the land of the dead:

> This is a wolf bite here that you can see. These little white spots here were made by a spirit. As soon as these spots disappear I will die. When my body died in that accident I told you about, the spirit took me. I went up to heaven. The people up there who shook my hands didn't have any bones; they had left their bones on earth. I could shake their hands and there was nothing but flesh.
>
> I am not trying to teach or preach now. We people, we unbelievers here, don't believe in something unless we see it. I am talking about things that really happened to me. I died in an accident at Hikuligjuaq. I was hit by the two by fours on the back of the sled. They broke. That Yamaha snowmobile that belonged to the government was stuck on my chest. Blood came out of my mouth right away. I was touched by a spirit. These little white spots right here are where the wolf bit me. It took me up in the sky and asked, "Do you want to go back to earth or do you want to stay here in heaven?" I said that my children were still small so I wanted to go back to earth. It told me when those little white spots disappeared I would die. Those spots are getting smaller and smaller. That means my death is getting closer as I get older, and I believe it.
>
> When people go through hard times and have a near death experience; then they really see the world of the spirits. There are marks on both of my legs. On this leg, if the black marks had won I would have been dead by now. The marks on the right one won, so I am still here amongst you. (Oosten and Laugrand 2010, pp. 79–80)

Suvaksiuq died in 2016. He told us several times his joy in retelling the experience he had gone through. His return to earth was motivated solely by his wish to see his children again; otherwise he would have preferred to stay in heaven.

In these two accounts of near-death experiences, shamanic and Christian ideas are intertwined. On the one hand, both of the elders had enjoyable visual experiences,

meeting deceased individuals—these beings who no longer have bones—and discovering the world of nonhumans. On the other hand, they may have encountered God. The chaplet likewise suggests integration of Christian belief, which is in no way incompatible with this type of experience.

It would be interesting to compare these near-death experiences with suicide, which happens so often in the Arctic. In the latter case, fear of death is similarly lost, an observation that Rasmussen (1929, p. 95) made a century ago. Like Suvaksiuq, some people manage to resist this loss of fear, but others give in. In the past, a suicidal person might ask family members to help carry out the act. A companion of Rasmussen, Jakob Olsen, reported the case of a woman from Chesterfield Inlet, where a Catholic mission had been present since 1912:

> One evening I went there as usual, and came in through the passage without noticing anything remarkable; the people were sitting about on the bench as they generally did; only I thought they seemed uncommonly silent. It was not the custom here to invite a visitor to sit down, and therefore, having emerged from the narrow entrance hole, I straightened myself up and went across at once to the spot where the sick woman used to lie. On coming nearer, I nearly cried out aloud: I found myself looking into a face that was perfectly blue, with a pair of great eyes projecting right out from the head, and the mouth wide open. I stood there a little to pull myself together, and now perceived a line fastened round the old woman's neck and from there to the roof of the hut. When I was able to speak once more, I asked those in the house what this meant. It was a long time before anyone answered. At last the son-in-law spoke up, and said: 'She felt that she was old, and having begun to spit up blood, she wished to die quickly, and I agreed. I only made the line fast to the roof, the rest she did herself.' (Rasmussen 1929, p. 96)

In that same time period, Birket-Smith (1929, p. 300) wrote that on such an occasion a family member should never reject a request for assistance by a parent who wishes to die. "Suicide is not rare, and it is the duty of pious children to assist their parents in committing it. As a rule the method is hanging" (See also Rasmussen 1931, pp. 506–507 with reference to the Utkuhigjalingmiut).

These practices did not really cease with Christianization. Rasmussen (1929, p. 97) described the case of an elderly man, Qalaseq, who killed himself at Chesterfield Inlet with the covert help of his wife Qalalâq:

> He had been ill for a year, and since there was no prospect of his recovery, he had grown tired of life, and had asked his wife to lend death a helping hand, but in such a fashion that he should not die during the hanging itself, but should he released from the hide thong that was to strangle him before he finally expired. Qalalâq accordingly assured me most earnestly that she had strangled him with the thong, but before he was quite dead, she had removed it, and at the same time held up before him a little crucifix, which had been given them by the missionary. Therefore, according to her view, Qalaseq had really died a natural death; they had only "hurried death up a little, as it is apt to be so very slow at times".

Suicides were fairly common in the 1940s and 1950s, many of them being committed by elderly shamans. In the Arviligjuar area, Father Van de Velde cited the example of Alakannuaq, a shaman who wished to end his life and was hanged by his two sons. In 1944, at Baker Lake, Father Choque reported a case of this sort: "In June, Old Nattilar, in a burst of paganism, and tired of suffering, committed suicide with a bullet in his heart. A procedure less painful and less lengthy than hanging,

which on a previous occasion he had reportedly attempted. His sons Amitnar and Okpagak have told Corporal Hamilton about their father's death" (Choque, unpublished manuscript, 2011, p. 30). In 1963, the missionary reported a case of a quite different type: "After coming back from the sanatorium on September 1st, Assiwak, 3 days later, committed suicide with a bullet in the back of his head, having, according to old Michel Kanayuk, discovered his wife's unfaithfulness during his absence" (Choque, unpublished manuscript, 2011, p. 30).

For elders of Rasmussen's time, as for those of today, death does not mark the end of a life. It is a rupture only with the humans of this world, leading in fact to other lives and other worlds. Rasmussen (1929, p. 74) reported that the Moon Spirit used to guide those who were ready for suicide, or who felt themselves in danger, and would call out to them: "Come, come to me! It is not painful to die. It is only a brief moment of dizziness. It does not hurt to kill yourself."

Although psychiatrists, physicians, and others have studied suicide in Inuit communities, they all ignore how Inuit see death and the afterlife, assuming their culture to be identical to our own, as if the Christianization of the North had totally removed all cultural differences. They instead prefer to focus on immediate, biomedical causes. Researchers and politicians follow suit, and everyone disregards the existence of cultural differences that are nonetheless obvious to anthropologists.

As seen in the above quote, Hall (1864, 1, p. 524) clearly says that some Inuit committed suicide in the mid-nineteenth century as a means to enter a happier world. This observation is hardly taken into account, any more than what elders have observed on the subject, and which likewise seems widely ignored. Yet an irresistible attraction to death and the afterlife is well documented. Inuit elders make a point of alerting young people to this danger, encouraging them to resist the seductive calls from the other world when life here no longer seems worthwhile. Although suicide does violate social norms—young people are not supposed to die first—and is tragic and distressing for those who remain, it is nonetheless an acceptable solution insofar as the process of life continues. Death merely opens the door to another life.

As for near-death experiences, these are not inspired in any way by TV or radio. They have long existed, just like the cases of a deceased Inuk being reborn in an infant body. On this point, Whites and Inuit seem to see things differently. In Western cultures, people use expressions like "out-of-body experience," "coming back from the brink of death," or "near-death experience," none of which indicate that the person really dies. Inuit have a very different perspective. Instead of getting close to the boundary of life, the person actually crosses it and then comes back. Inuit thus privilege the idea of dying and coming back to life. Here again, death is seen as something familiar and nothing to fear, in contrast to the Western view of death as odious and frightening. Inuit see death as a rebirth, and this imagery is omnipresent in the way they interpret shamanism and Christianity.

For Inuit, death is not the end. It is a process during which the components of a person come apart, each of them following its own fate. The body loses its unity, and the flesh putrefies, but two of the person's components still live elsewhere: the *tarniq* survives in a place after death, and the *atiq* survives among the person's con-

temporaries or descendants. Although Christianization and Westernization have shaken up and transformed many Inuit representations, neither has radically altered Inuit views of the afterlife or erased the importance of the dead. We may learn more about this continuity of Inuit belief by examining burial and post-burial rites, in particular the use of miniature figurines (see Laugrand and Oosten 2008). Such continuity was shown by Simon Tookoome, from Baker Lake, who described how, even today, some Inuit still offer dead people food and small objects: "Sometimes I give small gifts when I pass a grave; even if it is just a bit of food" (in Laugrand and Oosten 2010, pp. 280–285). Others say some words or perform a certain act to honour the departed individual.

After studying cases of near death among the Saulteaux, Irving Hallowell grasped the importance of the dead and their role as "companions" for the living. Though not worshipped, and though peripheral to the master spirits of the universe, their support was still fundamental for the living. This finding holds true for Inuit. Today, as in the past, the dead are valued partners who have been "helping men to achieve the ends for which they strive" (Hallowell 1960, p. 60). One must nonetheless know how to resist their seductive calls to partake in the mysterious beauty of the afterlife.

References

Ajaruaq, J. (1962). *Autobiographie de Jean Ajarua*. Manuscript at the Deschâtelets Archives.

Balikci, A. (1960). *Suicidal behaviour among the Netsilik Eskimos* (NCRC-60-2). Ottawa: NCRC.

Blaisel, X., & Arnakak, J. (1993). Trajet rituel: du harponnage à la naissance dans le mythe d'Arnaqtaaqtuq. *Études Inuit Studies,* 17(1), 15–46.

Boas, F. ([1888], 1964). *The Central Eskimo.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Boas, F. (1901). The Eskimo of Baffin Land and Hudson Bay. *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History, 15*(1), 1–370.

Birket-Smith, K. (1929). The Caribou Eskimos: Material and social life and their cultural position; Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921–1924, vol. 5(1–2).

Choque, C. (2011). *Baker Lake/Qamanituaq. Histoire de la mission catholique de Baker Lake (1927–1965)*. Unpublished manuscript on loan from the author.

Hall, C. F. (1864). *Life with the Esquimaux* (Vol. 1 and 2). London: Sampson, Low, Son and Marston.

Hallowell, I. (1960). The spirits of the dead in Saulteaux life and thought. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 70*(1), 29–51.

Hicks, J. (2015). *Statistical data on death by suicide by Nunavut Inuit*. Document prepared for NTI Inc., September, https://www.tunngavik.com/files/2015/09/2015-09-14-Statistical-Historical-Suicide-Date-Eng.pdf

Iglulik Oral History Database. IE-interviews, Database in Igloolik, Nunavut.

Kjellstrom, R. (1975–1976). Senilicide and invalidicide among the Eskimos. *Folk*, 16/17, 117.

Kolb, S., & Law, S. (Eds.). (2001). *Dreams and dream interpretation* (Vol. 4). Nunavut Arctic College: Iqaluit.

Laugrand, F. (2002). *Mourir et renaître. La reception du christianisme par les Inuit de l'Arctique de l'Est canadien*. Québec: PUL.

Laugrand, F., & Oosten, J. (2008). "When toys and ornaments come into play". The transformative power of miniatures in Canadian Inuit cosmology. *Museum Anthropology, 31*(2), 69–84.

Laugrand, F., & Oosten, J. (2010). *Inuit Shamanism and Christianity. Transitions and transformations*. Montréal: MQUP.
Iqallijuq, Rose. (1995). Interview with Frederic Laugrand. Igloolikk, manuscrit.
Lyons, G. F. (1824). *The private journal of captain G.F Lyon of HMS Hecla, during the recent voyage of discovery under captain Parry*. London: John Murray.
Oosten, J., & Laugrand, F. (Eds.). (2010). *Hardships of the past: Recollections of Arviat elders*. Nunavut Arctic College: Iqaluit.
Petersen, R. (1967). Burial-forms and death-cult among the Eskimos. *Folk, 8–9*, 259–280.
Rasmussen, K. (1929). *Intellectual culture of the Iglulik Eskimos* (Vol. 7(1) of report of the fifth Thule expedition 1921–1924). Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel.
Rasmussen, K. (1930). *Observations on the intellectual culture of the Caribou Eskimos: Iglulik and Caribou Eskimo texts* (Vol. 12 (2–3) of report of the fifth Thule expedition 1921–1924). Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel.
Rasmussen, K. (1931). *The Netsilik Eskimos: Social life and spiritual culture* (Vol. 8 (1–2) of report of the fifth Thule expedition 1921–1924). Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel.
Saladin d'Anglure, B. (1998). Entre forces létales et forces vitales: les tribulations du foeus et de l'enfant inuit. In F. Zonabend & C. Le Grand Sébille (Eds.), *Le foetus, le nourrisson et la mort* (pp. 55–76). Paris: L'Harmattan.
Saladin d'Anglure, B. (Ed.). (2001). *Cosmology and Shamanism* (Vol. 4). Nunavut Arctic College: Iqaluit.
Stevenson, L. (2014). *Life beside itself. Imagining care in the Canadian Arctic*. Oakland: University of California Press.
Therrien, M., & Laugrand, F. (Eds.). (2001). *Bien-être physique et psychique* (Vol. 5). Nunavut Arctic College: Iqaluit.

Eternity Calling: Modernity and the Revival of Death and the Afterlife

Raymond L. M. Lee

Abstract The fact that the death taboo is fervently debated and discussed suggests the paradox of its disclosure and evanescence. The proliferation of works on death and the afterlife in the modern era is rendering the subject of human mortality as more alive now than the many authors who have passed on. This is occurring at a time of an esoteric turn in thinking about the continuity of mind and the state of human consciousness beyond physical life. Extrapolations of near-death and post-death experiences are also contributing to new attitudes toward the meaning of after-death survival and the afterlife. Instead of witnessing an increase in death fears, we may now be heading in the direction of cultivating thanatos practice, the conscious effort to confront and prepare for the final moments of this life.

Keywords Death taboo · Afterlife · Near-death · Post-death · Death fears · Thanatos

"Remember the saucer-shaped pill?"
"Of course," she said. "A super piece of engineering."
"I found out what it's designed to do. It's designed to solve an ancient problem. Fear of death. It encourages the brain to produce fear-of-death inhibitors."
"But we still die."
"Everyone dies, yes."
"We just won't be afraid," she said.
"That's right."
"Interesting, I guess."

R. L. M. Lee (✉)
Formerly Anthropology and Sociology, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
e-mail: rlmlee@hotmail.com

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2019

H. Selin, R. M. Rakoff (eds.), *Death Across Cultures*, Science Across Cultures: The History of Non-Western Science 9,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18826-9_22

Modernity: Mortality Silenced?

The conversation was about Dylar, an experimental pill for treating humankind's most dreaded fear, the fear of death. This imaginary scene, coming from the satirical mind of novelist Don DeLillo (1986, pp.216–7), not only exemplifies our innermost fear but also the technological possibility of conquering that fear. Fear of death is considered a type of disease, much like cancer or AIDS. We can explore ways to overcome it with medical and pharmaceutical research. But Dylar does not offer immortality, only the control of our reaction to mortality. Why do we have such a negative reaction to death? Why is it even necessary to imagine the possibility of Dylar? The imagination itself may be construed as a parody of our utter powerlessness to stave off our appointment with death. The French sociologist Jean Baudrillard (1990, p.72) tells the following tale of death:

> [The soldier] believes he saw [Death] make a menacing gesture in his direction. He rushes to the king's palace and asks the king for his best horse in order that he might flee during the night far from Death, as far as Samarkand. Upon which the king summons Death to the palace and reproaches him for having frightened one of his best servants. But Death, astonished, replies: "I didn't mean to frighten him. It was just that I was surprised to see this soldier here, when we had a rendezvous tomorrow in Samarkand."

Death is portrayed as cynical and businesslike. There is no running from death, even if one flees to Samarkand. We are all in the vise of death and denial is our only protection. Since childhood, most of us have been taught not to speak of death. We were socialized to treat death as something unmentionable or associated with the accursed. Yet, even without discussing it, we come face to face with death at wakes and funerals. The simultaneous denial of and confrontation with death seems peculiar to human beings. It is an irresolvable internal disjunction of the human condition, a deep contradiction between the will to survive and the recognition of our mortality. It is this peculiar human condition that has instilled fear as the prime emotion associated with death. Fear is the key that locks us in anguish as we approach the end of our lives. Even "language squirms to avoid the finality of death" by presenting the dead as if they still exist (Haussamen 1998, p.320). This fear feeds the loneliness of dying since everyone, young or old, must face the moment of death alone. Ironically, fear has also aroused the need to know death, not in overcoming it but in dealing with it rationally. In other words, we attempt to transform our fear of death into a method for managing death and dying. This has perhaps been a major accomplishment of philosophers, physicians and psychologists in the modern era. Their efforts to research and clarify the meanings of death and dying and to convey their findings to the general public have in no small measure contributed to the end of our denial of death.

This modern confrontation with death in intellectual and practical terms is opening up new ways for us to inquire into our fate to die. Growing fascination with death can be seen in the burgeoning field of thanatology or death studies. The number of books and articles on death and dying keeps increasing. Courses on death and dying are included in university curricula in various countries around the world. These developments reflect our changing attitudes toward death. Our terror of death

is being transformed into attempts to understand death, although this does not necessarily imply that there is greater acceptance of life after death. Furthermore, high mortality rates resulting from accidents, illnesses, suicides, wars and other tragedies all over the world make it almost impossible for anyone to ignore death. Thus, death awareness rather than denial is meeting our need to reconcile the routines of everyday life with the impermanence of life itself.

The end of the twentieth century taboo on death suggests that death has become open to all types of inquiries, from the collation of mortality statistics to ethnographies of the death experience. The latter inquiry has a special place in the hearts of many researchers because it concerns a personal understanding of and direct confrontation with the final moments of life. Rather than denying our inevitable deaths, we want to know what it is like to die and how we can prepare ourselves. But analyzing the death experience is a formidable task since obviously we cannot interview the dead. Our present sources of data on this experience are limited to accounts given by dying patients and people who claimed to have had near-death encounters. We could also include as informants religious saints and advanced practitioners of yoga who might perceive meditation as a type of rehearsal for dying. This would imply that we consider their knowledge of meditation as a means for understanding the relationship between spirituality, consciousness and dying. From these few sources of data, death is gradually stepping out of the closet to disclose its unspoken nature. By bringing death into the open, we shed our fears to begin a new understanding of its nature.

The first step to bring death into the open is to ask whether death is a mere fading from life. Is death a descent into oblivion? More than a century ago, the American philosopher William James (1961, p.123) said that the fact that we can die is what perplexes us. It was an observation on the possibility of the unthinkable nature of voidness. To take dying as a form of disappearance is not unreasonable, but on further reflection we can see that such an assumption is both simplistic and nihilistic. If birth as the entrance to life is fraught with complexities, death as the opposite must surely be a less than straightforward process of leaving the world. The interaction of physiological, social and psychological conditions underlying birth suggests that each person's identity reflects the multiple levels of experience that determine his or her emergent path of consciousness into the world. When this path of consciousness exits the world, it is likely to be no less complicated than its coming into being at birth. Thus, dying cannot simply be a collapse of consciousness into nothingness because such nihilism cannot account for the emergence of identity in the first place.

If dying does not necessarily imply an absolute loss of identity but its transformation, the next question to ask is how can we understand the process by which this transformation takes place? There are several ways of approaching this question. Philosophically, we inspect the condition of being at death. Being means consciousness coming into its own to form a particular identity. Being a person means becoming a person or achieving personhood, but it does not necessarily suggest an identity bounded only by physical characteristics. These characteristics may only provide a putative identification of personhood but are not the central sources of that identification. Thus, physical breakdown at death would only suggest the unravelling of the

physical components of personhood. If personhood is more than the sum of its physical parts, then physical death cannot be equivalent to the termination of being. Put another way, the composition of an individual's identity is not based exclusively on his or her physical makeup. Is the arm, leg, hand, heart, liver or some other organ the source of a person's being? So when these physical attributes wither, what happens to being?

With these questions in mind, we can see that the fear of death as it became decloseted has morphed into a genre of writing. Ruminating on the relationship between becoming and dying has produced methodical approaches to writing it. The fading of the death taboo also meant the dawning of death textualization. From the mid-twentieth century onward, a proliferation of research and writing on death set in motion new ways of confronting the once dreaded subject. Where has it taken us and where will it take us in the future?

Writing Death

Writing death is, however, not exclusively modern. In ancient times, writings appeared that expressed the belief in a desirable afterlife. In the societies of ancient Egypt, Vedic India and classical Greece, such a belief arose with the "emergence of individual self-consciousness and as a correlate of faith in a higher reality" (Hick 1980, p.73). The quest for a better incarnation or reunification with the divine was possible because the idea of a soul surviving death took on the quality of an inner self that possessed moral consciousness. Thus, the application of moral consciousness to an already existing belief in the afterlife became the condition for envisaging the possibilities of spiritual enhancement after death. Later developments in premodern times invested people with the idea that personal conduct determined individual destiny. One might fear death but possessed the opportunity to rectify earthly existence through moral actions in order to sublimate fear into a higher identity. Writing in *The Republic* and *Phaedo*, the Greek philosopher Plato (1946, 1953) argued for a fuller existence in a transcendental realm after death. Fear and grief would not affect those who saw death as the ultimate liberation from the bonds of this life. Similarly, in the *Upanishads* that form the concluding portion of the Indian Vedas, the philosophy of the transcendental-self (*atman*) provided a view of death as a path to divine union. Such philosophy brought relief to those who did not equate the ego with the self that "is immortal, self-luminous, self-proved and beyond doubts and denials" (Sharma 1987, p.21). Death of the ego as a finite entity would not be feared since the transcendental-self is never affected by this event.

In the modern era, the plausibility of the afterlife receded despite the persistence of this idea in religious teachings. One reason for this skepticism toward the afterlife has to do with the predominance of the ego concept. Despite being treated as something finite and enclosed, the ego has come to increase its scope of influence by becoming a knowledge-seeking entity destined to understand and master the vicissitudes of this world. As ego came into its own as the 'modern self', the transcendental-self assumed a mythic quality and the notion of the afterlife became

irrelevant. The work of Sigmund Freud (1975) illustrates the length to which modern thinkers have taken to repress the notion of the afterlife. In positing the concept of the death instinct, Freud juxtaposed it to the sex instinct underlying the will to life and survival. The death instinct negated the sex instinct by inculcating in the organism a striving toward a return to inanimate status. Freud's idea of the death instinct was marked by pessimism that was partly caused by his own personal tragedies which likely resulted in a failed attention to the question of human consciousness in the death process (Clack 2002, ch.3). His focus on death as a return to inanimate existence suggests the total absence of thought given to the meaning of the afterlife. People and living things just died without any trace of consciousness remaining.

Aside from Freud, we find a gamut of writings dealing with Western attitudes toward death. These works are chiefly concerned with how the modern self comes to face death in contexts of changing meanings. Ariès (1974, 1981) compared medieval with modern dying as a shift in perception from personal liberation to relational adjustments. Gorer (1965) addressed death and mourning in Britain as largely a private and cloistered affair. Glaser and Strauss (1965) wrote about the tight-lipped manner in which American doctors approached the subject of death. This tradition continues with works exploring the self-conscious anticipation of death, the cultural correlates of dying, and the modern contexts in which the experience of dying is shaped (Elias 1985; Nuland 1994; Walter 1994; Noys 2005; Kellehear 2007, 2014). More specifically, some writers examined the process of dying in bureaucratized environments (Sudnow 1967; Lofland 1978; Kaufman 2005) while others considered the psychological states of denial and acceptance (Kübler-Ross 1973) or the meaningfulness of personalized rituals (De Hennezel 1998; Anderson 2004). Complementing these studies are writings oriented to inspirational accounts of dying (Blackman 1997) and the practical aspects of managing death in physical and spiritual terms (White 1980; Foos-Graber 1989; Humphry 1991; Lief 2001), as well as the rare treatment of bodily decay (Quigley 1996; Bass and Jefferson 2003). There is also a large literature devoted to the analysis of bereavement and grief (Saunders 1989; Stroebe et al. 1993; Smith 1994; Young et al. 1996; Walter 1999; Walter 2007; Thompson 2002).

On the intellectual side, ruminations on death centered on the existentialist idea of Being-toward-death (Heidegger 1962) and its relation to meaning and chance (Sartre 1956). Recent philosophical writings on this problem can be found in Milligan (2007) and, from an Upanishadic perspective, Easwaran (1981). A psychoanalytic approach to death anxiety was eminently espoused by Becker (1973). In British sociology, a lively debate on the death taboo and the sequestration thesis spanned two decades (Walter 1991; Mellor and Shilling 1993; Willmott 2000; Lee 2008; Stanley and Wise 2011). Rather than witnessing a death taboo, we find in all these writings a boom in discourses on death. If there was ever a death taboo, or at least an appearance of it, it had certainly vanished by the mid-twentieth century. Intellectuals and segments of the general public have become more sensitive to the need to face directly the question of death. Yet, this question is probed largely within a paradigm where the concern with bodily death or physical annihilation is not treated as concomitant with the preexistence and survival of mind. Even if some correspondence between body and mind is assumed, the paradigm still does not

make room for considerations of the after-death state. However, in the last half century, writings on near-death and post-death experiences have compelled a rethinking of the body-mind problem. A vital question raised by these writings is whether we can construe these experiences as offering a perspective that takes the mind as being *beyond* the body. It is a perspective that redefines death fears as a failure to engage with the primacy of mind rather than body. How have records of these experiences contributed to an alternative view of death?

Near-Death and Post-Death Experiences

In 2012 Eben Alexander, an American neurosurgeon, made headlines when he published an account of his sojourn to the afterlife in a near-death experience (NDE). Four years earlier, he had contracted a rare form of bacterial meningitis and lapsed into a coma for 7 days. He was not expected to survive, yet he made an amazing recovery to become one of few medical practitioners to explore the inner experiences of a near-death state. Some excerpts from his account would provide a glimpse into such an experience (Alexander 2012, pp.29, 30, 38, 39):

> Consciousness, but consciousness without memory or identity – like a dream where you know what's going on around you, but have no real idea of who, or what, you are … I didn't have a body – not one that I was aware of anyway. I was simply … *there*, in this place of pulsing, pounding darkness … Language, emotion, logic: these were all gone … I was clueless as to the rules that governed this world I was in, but I was in no hurry to learn them … Then I heard a new sound: a *living* sound, like the richest, most complex, most beautiful piece of music you've ever heard … I was flying, passing over trees and fields, streams and waterfalls, and here and there, people … A beautiful, incredible dream world …
>
> Except it wasn't a dream …

He went on to describe his ride on the wing of a butterfly with a beautiful girl with high cheekbones and deep blue eyes. Later, he encountered a brilliant orb that seemed to be living and almost solid. These experiences were indeed baffling as his brain, or more specifically the neo-cortex, had already shut down. For physical reductionists, his consciousness could no longer be regarded as operative since it was assumed that all of consciousness depended on brain function (Alexander 2012, p.8). But only a paradox was apparent: a clarity of mind in a state where it was not deemed possible. This has come to form the essence of most NDEs: the brain-dead person or one who is no longer alive in the body recalling, after resuscitation, incredibly lucid thinking and acting in another dimension. Alexander may be the first Western neurosurgeon to question in the light of his NDE the locus of consciousness in the brain. Yet, he is not the first person to address the meaningfulness of such an experience. In ancient times, records of NDEs were preserved in the works of luminaries such as Plato (1946) who recounted the story of Er, the fallen soldier returning from the dead, and Plutarch (1984) who described the events surrounding the revenants, Thespesius and Timarchus (see Van der Sluijs 2009). The historian of religion, Carol Zaleski (1988, p.5) has retold these tales of near-death, adding that

> …in Western culture, return-from-death stories developed within and alongside the apocalyptic traditions of late antiquity, flourished in the Middle Ages, declined during the Reformation, and reappeared in connection with some of the evangelical, separatist, and spiritualist movements of the nineteenth century. Today these tales have returned in full force in the form of "near-death" testimony, first popularized in the early 1970s by Raymond Moody's best-selling book *Life After Life*, and kept in the public eye since then by a flood of books, articles, talk shows, and films on the subject.

Raymond Moody (1975, 1977) was the American philosopher and psychiatrist who coined the term NDE in a manner to suggest the possibility of an impossible state of mind sandwiched between life and death. It was considered a revolutionary idea for understanding death as *not* equivalent to an annihilation of the self. His books not only became bestsellers but also led to the founding of the US-based International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS), as recounted by Zaleski (1988, pp.110–12). Although American in origin, the research initiated by IANDS has spread all over the world to imply the universal nature of the phenomenon (Sabom 1982; Grey 1985; Ring 1985; Morse and Perry 1990; Fenwick and Fenwick 1995; Kellehear 1996; Kellehear 2008; Fox 2003; Parnia 2006; Belanti et al. 2008; Holden et al. 2009; Van Lommel 2010; Perera et al. 2011; Pearson 2015).

Basically, the NDE represents a life-changing event that not only overturns all previous assumptions held against the continuity of mind after death but also promotes the belief in a transcendental future. This is a future that exceeds all expectations of spatiotemporal progression in earthly life. But only in dying temporarily can returnees from death discover this beyond-ness even as their own identities are not lost in the transition to a new mode of existence. Badham (1997, p.16) put it this way: "an NDE can very strongly encourage belief in a future life but cannot override strongly-held philosophical beliefs about what it means to be a person." He cited the case of the atheist philosopher A.J. Ayer (1992) who subsequent to his NDE reconsidered the plausibility of the continuity of mind but could not immediately disavow the hope for his own obliteration (for his previous position, see Ayer 1976, p.121). The NDE is therefore a direct, if not an unconventional, way of asserting the primacy of mind. At the same time, it is also a testimony to a form of self-transcendence that challenges the fear of death as signified by the death taboo. However, the NDE may be depicted as only an introductory encounter with the beyond that raises more questions than it actually answers. For instance, is the NDE a special type of hallucination or the equivalent of an epiphany? Returnees may lose their fear of death but they cannot say with certainty what the transcendental future holds for them. Alexander (Alexander and Tompkins 2014) attempted to address this question with speculations on "the map of heaven." Ultimately, the NDE evidences new room for thought on the autonomy of mind and the experiential complexities stemming from having been in a post-physical state. It will continue to perplex as well as inform us on what it means to experience the moment of being in death.

The idea that the mind cannot be confined only to the body is also a basis of belief in post-death experiences (PDEs). Like NDEs, PDEs also concern visionary encounters with deceased individuals. Whereas NDEs typically involve the recollections of revenants who allegedly met up with the dead, PDEs refer to people who have sought to communicate with the dead or unexpectedly encountered them in

unusual circumstances. In popular culture, the former category is usually portrayed as traffickers in spiritualism and the latter as narrators of ghostly experiences. But there are anomalous cases in which skeptics and rationalists become convinced that the dead are trying to reach them via the manifestation of paranormal events. In these cases, the narrators described their transformation of beliefs as they came to perceive death not as the end of life but its continuation in a non-physical realm. For instance, James Pike, the former Episcopalian bishop of California, related his experiences in communicating with his dead son through the services of a British medium (Pike and Kennedy 1969). Pike's account was as much a description of his struggle to understand his son's suicide as his own confrontation with death within the context of his Christian beliefs. In another case involving suicide and séance, Elisa Medhus, a doctor of internal medicine, made contact with her dead son through the mediation of a medium (Medhus 2013). Like Pike, Medhus resorted to spiritual channelling after having experienced a series of psychical events. More than 40 years separate the two cases but their similarities suggest a growing candidness in dealing with death as a personal rather than an abstract issue. The personal in PDEs is also treated as part of the grieving process and forms a new field of study often referred to as after-death communications (Haraldsson 1989; Guggenheim and Guggenheim 1996; Devers 1997; Klugman 2006; Nowatzki and Kalischuk 2009; Kwilecki 2011). It has also branched into the investigation of individuals encountering the dead without realizing they are no longer alive (Greyson 2010).

Judging from the tenor of these reports, it would seem that the dead are portrayed as being more alive than absent and forgotten. But this portrayal is not the same as reviving the notion of the immortal soul. Rather, it addresses the prevailing assumption of an unchanging divide between life and death (Howarth 2000). In this inquiry, death is not simply acknowledged as physical demise but recognized as the transition of a person's identity and consciousness to another state of awareness, a condition that is contextually post-physical and simultaneously open to re-contact with the physical. In short, death is not necessarily the opposite of life but a mirror of the afterlife. How is the afterlife reimagined in a milieu where mind allegedly prevails over material decay?

Reimagining the Afterlife

Every culture and religion has produced narratives concerning the existence of worlds beyond the present one. These narratives are considered traditional formulations of the afterlife, realms occupied by people who have passed on from this life. Names given to the afterlife such as Heaven, Hell, Sheol, Purgatory and Limbo suggest binary oppositions that contrast the ecstasy and misery of the post-physical state. Based on these traditional narratives, transition to the afterlife does not spell the end of human feelings but implies a highly aroused cognitive and affective state that continues to make distinctions between pleasure and pain, calm and agitation, relief and discomfort. Liberation from the physical state after death does not necessarily result in a withdrawal of dualistic reality. On the contrary, the elements

underlying this reality may continue to operate beyond physical limits and take on highly flexible and exaggerated characteristics unchecked by physical boundaries.

This idea of new meanings mixed with old feelings in the hereafter suggests varied re-imaginations of the continuity of mind instead of an "eclipse of eternity" (Walter 1998). Present studies of afterlife beliefs (Le Goff 1984; Russell 1997; Miller 1998; MacDannell and Lang 2001; McGrath 2003; Segal 2004; Schweid 2006; Fontana 2009; Frohock 2010; Garrett 2012; Singleton 2012; Lee 2013; Vanolo 2016) not only reiterate the old themes of heaven and hell but also point toward the multi-dimensional explorations of the self after death. For instance, the Tibetan Buddhist theory of the afterlife offers a compelling explanation of how meanings and emotions are intensified after death. In this theory, death of the body frees the mind to experience very powerful imageries that can evoke intense emotions. It refers to the movement of consciousness between different states of existence as the movement between *bardo*, the intermediate state. Generally, there are three *bardos* between death and the next life. In *Chikai Bardo* or the *bardo* of dying moments, withdrawal of the life force from the body brings on experiences related to the dissolution of the physical elements (earth, water, fire and air). Breakdown of these elements is usually accompanied by psychological tumult but in certain cases of accomplished awareness, signs related to a display of specific colors, lights and sounds are perceived as the preceding condition leading to a union with the clear light or primordial mind. In *Chönyi Bardo* or the *bardo* of visionary contact, the dominant images are those of particular deities and their corresponding colors, lights and sounds. In *Sipai Bardo* or the *Bardo* of seeking rebirth, different colors and lights direct consciousness into assuming a new identity. Generally, such a theory treats the mind as prior to the body since it addresses the meaning of consciousness as the determinant of being during and after death. The body is merely considered a vehicle for the operation of consciousness, which alone encounters the signs of dying, rebirth and spiritual union through the recognition of differences between colors, lights and sounds experienced in death. *Bardo* theory, once a secret doctrine, made its initial impact in the English-speaking world through the work of Walter Evans-Wentz (1927) who, with the assistance of Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup, compiled and edited *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (*Bardo Thödol*) for publication in 1927. Since then, there have been at least two more English translations of the *Bardo Thödol* (Fremantle and Trungpa 1975; Thurman 1994). Popularity of *bardo* theory is evidenced by recent publications of various texts on death and dying in the Tibetan tradition (Lama Lodö 1987; Mullin 1987; Chökyi 1989; Sogyal 1992). The wide distribution of these works suggests that there are indeed many readers who have intellectual and practical interests in pondering the possibility of the afterlife.

If the afterlife can be taken seriously as a context for the reworking of consciousness, then we can postulate the meaning of death in terms of identity transformation effected by the continuity of mind. By doing this, we recast the problem of death as a new experience of being rather than its extinction. This has also been accomplished by practitioners of conscious dreaming who use moments of reflective awareness in the dream-state as a means to reconnoiter specific dreamscapes as a personal geography of the afterlife (Lee 2017). Instead of presuming the dream-state to be unreal or as not amenable to conscious control, conscious dreamers may

rearrange their experiences in dream-travel to create an art of dying not dissimilar to various aspects of Tibetan dream yoga (Norbu 1992; Tenzin 1998; Wallace 2012). In this art, preparations are undertaken for the dreamer to direct awareness toward the exploration of stable locales in the dreamscape. As one of the leading advocates of conscious dreaming, Robert Moss (1996, 1998) proposes that not all dreamscapes lack stability, but it is necessary for dream-travellers to familiarize themselves with certain locales that have a pre-constructed quality in order to assess the autonomy of these realms. This is a proposal that not only challenges the hoary idea of heaven and hell as fixed destinations in the afterlife but also introduces to modern dreamers non-Western notions of shamanic sojourns to the afterlife. These are sojourns recounted by shamans from various cultures that emphasize otherworldly realities as intrinsic to the movement of consciousness into non-physical realms (e.g. Eliade 1972; Halifax 1979; Kalweit 1988; Couliano 1991; Moss 2005). By adopting the shamanic mission to seek otherworldly knowledge for healing practices, dream-travellers may relearn the meanings of dreaming as well as rehearse the dying process as a discovery of other realms.

These alternative approaches to the afterlife represent part of an esoteric turn in the modern treatment of human consciousness that refocuses the imagination on mind expansion and its elasticity of experience. It puts the afterlife in the same category as the practice of consciousness transference. This is a practice that takes mind as unaffected by the same decay that afflicts the physical body. Mind is its own power for transforming. When the relation between mind and body is treated as inconceivable, bodily decay at death implies that we cannot say anything about how it affects the state of mind. However, an esoteric turn allows a shift of attention to the reciprocal causality of mind and body. When the body disintegrates in death, we want to know how consciousness is sustained and altered by the lack or loss of physical support. Physically-based concepts and actions such as eating, bathing and exercising would naturally become superfluous, but the question is what impact would such absence have on the operation of mind? It would also allow the reception of mind as an empowerment of consciousness to encounter other realities; in which case consciousness transference implies the practiced attempt at realizing the goal of reaching the afterlife before actual death. *Bardo* theory and conscious dreaming may provide some outlines of this empowerment of consciousness but are not always considered as offering indisputable proof for the continuity of mind and the plausibility of the afterlife. Instead, there would be a level of uncertainty in the prescribed practices since no one could be consistently immune to doubts about what might be achievable (for a Buddhist analysis, see Fenner 2002). Indeed, one could be intrigued by methods of preparing for the afterlife but, at the same time, become puzzled by its reachability. Yet the question of the afterlife drives the hope for better existences in the transcendental future and therefore maintains a certain momentum in writings on the possibility of such a future.

On the other hand, critique of the afterlife as a myth (Martin and Augustine 2015) addresses the impossibility of such a future. Based on a strongly empiricist position favoring matter over mind, it reduces all consciousness to brain activity and cessation of this activity unequivocally ends all quests for the transcendental future.

As a form of nihilistic philosophy, it posits the certainty of inaction and nothingness induced by death. To some minds troubled by the vagueness of the transcendental future, nothing could be more pleasing than to know for certain that all consciousness would end with death. But this certainty may also become a source of anxiety that panics the mind over the eventual loss of one's identity. To become extinct in death simply means the termination of being and knowing who you once were. If this were the prevailing scenario around the world today, it would imply the futility of remembering and paying homage to ancestors, relatives, friends and colleagues who have passed on. Yet this is not the case across contemporary cultures as rituals of memorializing the dead have not been abandoned or abrogated. Continuation of ancestor worship and other forms of ritualistic remembrance suggests a deep human refusal to relinquish connections to preexisting identities and to totally suspend beliefs of after-death existence. Indeed, death is not treated as a cutoff point but an occasion for worship, celebration, and spiritual engagement (e.g. Jordan 1972; Smith 1974; Huntington and Metcalfe 1979; Endres and Lauser 2011). It would also suggest that treating the afterlife as a myth might paradoxically reproduce its desirability, if only to assuage the mind of its susceptibility to discontinuity and to assure people of the durability of their identities. After all, if we believe that for each and every person death is only a one-time affair, we could also come to believe that it is an affair without end.

The Future: The Way of Death

An exceptionally strong expression of the death taboo would depict a total moratorium on the subject of death where no one might speak of death or come into contact with anything closely and remotely associated with the end of life. But this has not happened in the annals of human existence. We are inexhaustibly surrounded by the presence of death, from the moment we discover the fragility of life to the time we ponder the absurdity of life itself. In that sense, it is implausible to conceptualize the death taboo as a means to limit or prevent our confrontation with death. The need to face death and question its immanence has always been part of the human existential condition, regardless of our social, cultural and political differences. Not long ago, a friend suffering from terminal cancer spoke to me as if he was going to recover; yet he knew he was approaching his end. He signalled this by giving me a last gift, a large packet of brilliantly-colored oranges, as a tacit way of bidding me his final farewell. The gift was also his way of demythologizing the taboo.

If the human dialogue with death has never been relentlessly repressed, then what is the significance of the death taboo? The taboo itself is not specific to any society, culture, or a particular moment in human history. Yet it is always spoken of as if it were integral to the human concern with death. But it is the fear of death that is fundamental to this concern, the fear that in dying we would be robbed of our identities, accomplishments, and anything dear to our hearts. Fear is the key to understanding the construction of the taboo as a reminder of our anxiety in facing

the loss of personhood. Not to see, hear, or talk of matters related to death is simply an exaggerated way of staving off this anxiety, particularly since the social premise of modernity is speed – the acceleration of all social actions, relations and innovations (Rosa 2003; Tomlinson 2007; Hassan 2009). The modern age is not only a time for expanding the scope of knowledge but it is also driving the speed for grasping and utilizing that knowledge. Everything is in rapid motion and producing a vertiginous effect on thoughts, emotions and actions (Young 2007). The demand for instantaneity, especially with the digitalization of communication, has become irreversibly infectious. We now live in an epoch of perennial obsolescence where ideas and things age rapidly, making it difficult for anyone to behave as if alacrity is alarming. Normalization of speed has also made acute our sense of impermanence. If ideas and things seem to decay in no time at all, so too does our subjection to the forces of entropy become even more paramount and the sense of doom more vexatious.

In this climate of modernized decay, it would make sense to represent the death taboo as a panacea to the despair we might experience as we rush toward our own eventual demise. But this does not appear to be the case, as attested by the survey of writings on death and the afterlife. Instead, the death taboo seems to have lost its laconic purchase. The fervent revival of thinking and writing on death is not a testimony to our fey condition in modernity; rather it reflects a decisively pronounced confrontation with thanatos, our imagined end of earthly existence and essence of the beyond. This plethora of writings is not only showcasing a greater sophistication among writers and readers in debating and understanding death, but it is also introducing a type of death pragmatism where participants can use these debates and understandings as thanatos practice, the means to preparing and enacting the steps to face our inevitable end.

Thanatos practice may be considered the future way of death. It is creating for writers and readers of death and dying a new space for redefining the meaning of the end of life (but not necessarily the end of existence) and for advancing from the condition of fearing death to that of navigating consciousness in death. A new spectrum of ideas, methods, and philosophies is emerging in this space that cuts across cultures and societies. With the globalization of knowledge augmented by digital media, thanatos practice is incorporating a wide range of ideas, teachings and instructions on how to face death without panic or loss of control. For instance, deathing techniques traceable to Indian tantric and Tibetan spiritual practices can be said to offer an approach to conscious dying with the application of mind control in the final moments of physical life (Lee 2007). Traditional religious knowledge, innovative syncretic techniques, New Age philosophies, and even biomedical knowledge may be seen to be filling this space in an age where more people seem to be living longer on borrowed time but are also desiring to know what awaits them after this life is over. This new space is emerging from the modern need to rediscover the ancient quest for knowing death and the possibility of a transcendental future. It should not be judged as being equivalent to the quest for euthanasia where voluntariness for self-induced death is considered just and humane for ending suffering. Rather, it could be construed as a contrast to euthanasia since the practice is

focused on knowing and preparing for the final moment that no one can postpone or reverse. Such preparation does not imply a striving for voluntary death but for the realization that our destiny to die is also a destiny to deconstruct death in the most pragmatic and fearless manner. For that reason, if there was ever a death taboo it has undoubtedly outlived its purpose – for the silence it has attempted to impose is turning into a vast arena for relearning and redefining the meaning of death.

References

Alexander, E. (2012). *Proof of heaven*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Alexander, E., & Tompkins, P. (2014). *The map of heaven*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Anderson, M. (2004). *Sacred dying: Creating rituals for embracing the end of life*. New York: Marlowe.

Ariès, P. (1974). *Western attitudes toward death*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ariès, P. (1981). *The hour of our death*. New York: Knopf.

Ayer, A. J. (1976). *The central questions of philosophy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Ayer, A. J. (1992). What I saw when I was dead. In P. Edwards (Ed.), *Immortality* (pp. 269–275). London: Macmillan.

Badham, P. (1997). Religion and near-death experience in relation to belief in a future life. *Mortality, 2*(1), 7–21.

Bass, B., & Jefferson, J. (2003). *Death's acre: Inside the legendary 'body farm'*. London: Time Warner.

Baudrillard, J. (1990). *Seduction*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Becker, E. (1973). *The denial of death*. New York: Free Press.

Belanti, J., Perera, M., & Jagadheesan, K. (2008). Phenomenology of near-death experiences: A cross-cultural perspective. *Transcultural Psychiatry, 45*(1), 121–133.

Blackman, S. (1997). *Graceful exits: How great beings die*. New York: Weatherhill.

Chökyi, N. R. (1989). *The union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen*. Nepal: Rangjung Yeshe Publications.

Clack, B. (2002). *Sex and death*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Couliano, I. P. (1991). *Out of this world: Otherworldly journeys from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein*. Boston: Shambhala.

De Hennezel, M. (1998). *Intimate death: How the dying teach us how to live*. New York: Vintage.

De Lillo, D. (1986). *White noise*. London: Penguin.

Devers, E. (1997). *After-death communication: Experiences with departed loved ones*. London: Robert Hale.

Easwaran, E. (1981). *Dialogue with death*. Tomales: Nilgiri Press.

Eliade, M. (1972). *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Elias, N. (1985). *The loneliness of the dying*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Endres, K. W., & Lauser, A. (2011). *Engaging the spirit world: Popular beliefs and practices in modern Southeast Asia*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Evans-Wentz, W. Y. (1927). *The Tibetan book of the dead*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fenner, P. (2002). *The edge of certainty*. York Beach: Nicholas-Hays.

Fenwick, P., & Fenwick, E. (1995). *The truth in the light*. London: Headline.

Fontana, D. (2009). *Life beyond death: What should we expect?* London: Watkins.

Foos-Graber, A. (1989). *Deathing*. York Beach: Nicholas-Hays.

Fox, M. (2003). *Religion, spirituality and the near-death experience*. London: Routledge.

Fremantle, F., & Trungpa, C. (1975). *The Tibetan book of the dead*. Boston: Shambhala.

Freud, S. (1975). *Beyond the pleasure principle*. New York: Norton.
Frohock, F. (2010). *Beyond: On life after death*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
Garrett, G. (2012). *Entertaining judgment: The afterlife in popular imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1965). *Awareness of dying*. Chicago: Aldine.
Gorer, G. (1965). *Death, grief and mourning in contemporary Britain*. London: Cresset Press.
Grey, M. (1985). *Return from death: An exploration of the near-death experience*. London: Arkana.
Greyson, B. (2010). Seeing dead people not known to have died: "Peak in Darien" experiences. *Anthropology and Humanism, 35*(2), 159–171.
Guggenheim, B., & Guggenheim, J. (1996). *Hello from heaven*. New York: Bantam Books.
Halifax, J. (1979). *Shamanic voices*. New York: Dutton.
Haraldsson, E. (1989). Survey of claimed encounters with the dead. *Omega, 19*(2), 103–113.
Hassan, R. (2009). *Empires of speed: Time and the acceleration of politics and society*. Leiden: Brill.
Haussamen, B. (1998). Death and syntax. *Death Studies, 22*(4), 307–320.
Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time*. New York: Harper.
Hick, J. H. (1980). *Death and eternal life*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
Holden, J. M., Greyson, B., & James, D. (2009). *The handbook of near-death experiences: Thirty years of investigation*. Santa Barbara: Praeger.
Howarth, G. (2000). Dismantling the boundaries between life and death. *Mortality, 5*(1), 127–138.
Humphry, D. (1991). *Final exit: Practicalities of self-deliverance and assisted suicide for the dying*. New York: Dell.
Huntington, R., & Metcalife, P. (1979). *Celebrations of death: The anthropology of mortuary rituals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
James, W. (1961). *The varieties of religious experience*. New York: Collier-Macmillan.
Jordan, D. K. (1972). *Gods, ghosts and ancestors: The folk religion of a Taiwanese village*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Kalweit, H. (1988). *Dreamtime and inner space: The world of the shaman*. Boston: Shambhala.
Kaufman, S. (2005). *And a time to die*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Kellehear, A. (1996). *Experiences near death: Between medicine and religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Kellehear, A. (2007). *A social history of dying*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Kellehear, A. (2008). Census of non-Western near-death experiences to 2005: Overview of the current data. *Journal of Near-Death Studies, 26*(4), 249–265.
Kellehear, A. (2014). *The inner life of the dying person*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Klugman, C. (2006). Dead men talking: Evidence of post-death contact and continuing bonds. *Omega, 24*(2), 249–262.
Kübler-Ross, E. (1973). *On death and dying*. London: Tavistock.
Kwilecki, S. (2011). Ghosts, meaning, and faith: After-death communications in bereavement narratives. *Death Studies, 35*(3), 219–243.
Le Goff, J. (1984). *The birth of purgatory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Lee, R. L. M. (2007). Mortality and re-enchantment: Conscious dying as individualized spirituality. *Journal of Contemporary Religion, 22*(2), 221–234.
Lee, R. L. M. (2008). Modernity, mortality and re-enchantment: The death taboo revisited. *Sociology, 42*(4), 745–759.
Lee, R. L. M. (2013). Facing the beyond: Experiences, metaphors and spiritualities of the afterlife. *Journal of Contemporary Religion, 28*(1), 109–124.
Lee, R. L. M. (2017). Continuity, conscious dreaming and dying: Implications of dream-travel to the afterlife. *International Journal of Dream Research, 10*(1), 95–99.
Lief, J. (2001). *Making friends with death: A Buddhist guide to encountering death*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
Lodö, L. (1987). *Bardo teachings*. Ithaca: Snow Lion.
Lofland, L. (1978). *The craft of dying*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

MacDannell, C., & Lang, B. (2001). *Heaven: A history*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Martin, M., & Augustine, K. (2015). *The myth of an afterlife: The case against life after death*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
McGrath, A. E. (2003). *A short history of heaven*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Medhus, E. (2013). *My son and the afterlife*. New York: Atria.
Mellor, P. A., & Shilling, C. (1993). Modernity, self-identity and the sequestration of death. *Sociology, 27*(3), 411–431.
Miller, S. (1998). *After death: How people around the world map the journey after life*. New York: Touchstone.
Milligan, T. (2007). Mortality and the other. *Mortality, 12*(3), 304–311.
Moody, R. (1975). *Life after life*. Covington: Mockingbird Books.
Moody, R. (1977). *Reflections of life after life*. Covington: Mockingbird Books.
Morse, M., & Perry, P. (1990). *Closer to the light: Learning from children's near-death experiences*. New York: Villard.
Moss, R. (1996). *Conscious dreaming*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
Moss, R. (1998). *Dreamgates*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
Moss, R. (2005). *Dreamways of the Iroquois*. Rochester: Destiny Books.
Mullin, G. (1987). *Death and dying: The Tibetan tradition*. London: Arkana.
Norbu, N. (1992). *Dream yoga and the practice of natural light*. Ithaca: Snow Lion.
Nowatzki, N. R., & Kalischuk, R. G. (2009). Post-death encounters: Grieving, mourning and healing. *Omega, 24*(2), 91–111.
Noys, B. (2005). *The culture of death*. Oxford: Berg.
Nuland, S. B. (1994). *How we die: Reflections on life's final chapter*. New York: Knopf.
Parnia, S. (2006). *What happens when we die?* Carlsbad: Hay House.
Pearson, P. (2015). *Opening heaven's door*. New York: Atria.
Perera, M., Jagadheesan, K., & Peake, A. (2011). *Making sense of near-death experiences*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
Pike, J. A., & Kennedy, D. (1969). *The other side*. London: W.H. Allen & Co..
Plato. (1946). *The republic*. London: Heinemann.
Plato. (1953). *Phaedo*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Plutarch. (1984). *Moralia* (Vol. 7). London: Heinemann.
Quigley, C. (1996). *The corpse: A history*. Jefferson: McFarland & Co..
Ring, K. (1985). *Heading towards omega: In search of the meaning of the near-death experience*. New York: William Morrow.
Rinpoche, S. (1992). *The Tibetan book of living and dying*. London: Rider.
Rinpoche, T. W. (1998). *The Tibetan yogas of dream and sleep*. Ithaca: Snow Lion.
Rosa, H. (2003). Social acceleration: Ethical and political consequences of a desynchronized high-speed society. *Constellations, 10*(1), 3–33.
Russell, J. B. (1997). *A history of heaven: The singing silence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Sabom, M. (1982). *Recollections of death: A medical investigation*. New York: Harper & Row.
Sanders, C. (1989). *Grief, the mourning after*. New York: Wiley.
Sartre, J.-P. (1956). *Being and nothingness*. New York: Philosophical Library.
Schweid, R. (2006). *Hereafter: Searching for immortality*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.
Segal, A. F. (2004). *Life after death: A history of the afterlife in Western religions*. New York: Doubleday.
Sharma, C. (1987). *A critical survey of Indian philosophy*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
Singleton, A. (2012). Beyond heaven? Young people and the afterlife. *Journal of Contemporary Religion, 27*(3), 453–468.
Smith, R. J. (1974). *Ancestor worship in contemporary Japan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Smith, A. (1994). *Gateway to life: Death and bereavement*. Leicester: InterVarsity Press.
Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (2011). The domestication of death: The sequestration thesis and domestic figuration. *Sociology, 45*(6), 947–962.

Stroebe, M. S., Stroebe, W., & Hanson, R. O. (1993). *Handbook of bereavement: Theory, research and intervention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Sudnow, D. (1967). *Passing on: The social organization of dying*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
Thompson, N. (2002). *Loss and grief: A guide for human services practitioners*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
Thurman, R. F. (1994). *The Tibetan book of the dead*. New York: Bantam Books.
Tomlinson, J. (2007). *The culture of speed*. London: Sage.
Van der Sluijs, M. (2009). Three ancient reports of near-death experiences: Bremmer revisited. *Journal of Near-Death Studies, 27*(4), 223–253.
Van Lommel, P. (2010). *Consciousness beyond life: The science of the near-death experience*. San Francisco: HarperOne.
Vanolo, P. (2016). Exploring the afterlife: Relational spaces, absent presences, and three fictional vignettes. *Space and Culture, 19*(2), 192–201.
Wallace, A. (2012). *Dreaming yourself awake: Lucid dreaming and Tibetan dream yoga for insight and transformation*. Boston: Shambhala.
Walter, T. (1991). Modern death: Taboo or not taboo? *Sociology, 25*(2), 293–310.
Walter, T. (1994). *The revival of death*. London: Routledge.
Walter, T. (1998). *Eclipse of eternity: A sociology of the afterlife*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
Walter, T. (1999). *On bereavement: The culture of grief*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
Walter, T. (2007). Modern grief, postmodern grief. *International Review of Sociology, 17*(1), 123–134.
White, J. (1980). *A practical guide to death and dying*. Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House.
Willmott, H. (2000). Death. So what? Sociology, sequestration and emancipation. *The Sociological Review, 48*(4), 649–665.
Young, J. (2007). *The vertigo of late modernity*. London: Sage.
Young, W., Parkes, C. M., & Laungani, P. (1996). *Death and bereavement across cultures*. London: Routledge.
Zaleski, C. G. (1988). *Otherworld journeys: Accounts of near-death experiences in medieval and modern times*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.